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# Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing Differentiated Instruction for English Language Learners

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Mary Pegram

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2019

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing Differentiated Instruction for English Language

Learners

by

Mary Pegram

MA, Western Kentucky University, 1978

BA, Kentucky State University, 1968

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Administrators and teachers are concerned that English Language Learners (ELLs) in an urban elementary school in a southern part of the United States are not meeting required state standards in reading. Teachers have indicated that they do not always know how to differentiate instruction for ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' implementation of differentiated instruction for ELLs. This research study was guided by the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Tomlinson's theory of implementing differentiated instruction. The research questions investigated teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction and their professional development for mediating instruction for ELLs. Six teachers from Grades 1 to 3 who teach ELLs with limited English-speaking ability and 2 ELL teachers participated in the study. Data were collected from transcribed interviews, open-ended surveys, and lesson plans. Inductive analysis was used to identify themes and commonalities within the collected data. The major themes included that differentiation is crucial for ELL instruction, teachers use varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs' individual needs, and teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs. The findings indicated a need for a professional development that include a systematic approach to differentiated instructional strategies to improve academic achievement for ELLs. A 3-day professional development was designed. The findings of this study and professional development may contribute to positive social change by increasing teachers' use of instructional strategies that align with the district's guidelines to improve learning and achievement for ELLs.

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## Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my grandmother, the late District Missionary Estella Mae Booker. She was a God-fearing woman who was the foundation of our family. She encouraged me to become a teacher. “Mama” believed in getting an education and doing something that will make a difference. I appreciate her strong and loving hands that worked to put me through college.

“Thank you, mama.”

I am also dedicating this paper to my twin sister Mae. She passed away May 8, 2016 after suffering a stroke. This is the first time in my life I have been without her. She encouraged me to “go ahead girl and get that degree”. I carry her in my heart each and every day.

“I miss you Mae and I Love You”

## Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank God who is the head of my life. With His infinite guidance, grace, and mercy, I am able to complete this doctoral journey with perseverance, satisfaction, dignity, and integrity. To my newly appointed Chair, Dr. Kimberley Alkins, many heartfelt thanks. Your added support guided my thoughts so that I was able to keep on track while on this doctoral journey. Thank you for taking on my doctoral project study and guiding me through the final path of completion. I would like to thank my second committee member Dr. Jerita Whaley for her excellent expertise, patience, and compassion that kept me focused on reaching my ultimate goal. As a student of Dr. Whaley, I learned to understand the purpose and need for research and how (if conducted properly) it may help to make a difference in the world. I am honored to have met some wonderful classmates as “study buddies”. Thank you, Lora, Betty, Tamika, Barbara, Rita, Irish, and Belinda. Some of them have already completed their doctoral journey, thank you for your never-ending encouragement. You all are the best!!!

I am grateful to Minister Nathaniel Wright, who received his doctorate degree 5 years ago, for his critiques of the writings for my proposal. Thank you to Ron and Teresa Jones, Tangelia Palmer, Charnita Davis, Anya and Floyd Crawford, Linda Mattox, JoAnn Shelton, Reneice Reese, Norris Miles, Elder Curtis Guyton Sr., First Lady Carolyn Guyton, Bishop John Fleming, Evangelist Romanetha Stallworth, Claudia Morris, and Beverly Haskins for their support and encouragement. To my family: John, Tonya, Paris, Sha-Brei, Evan, CJ, Cory, Corvez, Chelsea, Malachi, Jordaan, Corey Mikhal, Kaalhn, Herbert, Edward, Cliff, and DeWayne for your love, patience, and support.

Finally, to the three people who are the loves of my life: Sha-Rese, YaYa, and Brittanie. You three are the best daughters in the world. Thank you for assisting, encouraging, and listening as I pursued this doctoral degree. I could not have accomplished this milestone in my life without you! Lots of Hugs and Kisses!!



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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Differentiated instruction is designed to adapt instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners, provide each student with the appropriate level of challenge, and furnish support to help students reach their learning goals (Valiandes, 2015). Classroom teachers' effective implementation of differentiated instruction is necessary because of the increasing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) who are enrolled in U.S. schools. Baecher, Artiglieri, Patterson, and Spatzer (2012) indicated that by 2015, enrollment of ELLs will reach 10 million. Differentiation requires teachers to adjust curriculum and create learning activities that provide skills and concepts for ELLs to experience successful academic achievement. Tomlinson (2001) explained that differentiated instruction is grounded in an understanding of how people learn. Because students have different learning styles, preferences, strengths, and abilities, they need varying opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge based on teaching.

When teachers implement differentiated instruction, students have opportunities to use their skills to build upon new concepts using their existing knowledge. Incorporating skills, interests, abilities, and previous experiences teachers can successfully differentiate instruction that can assist all students with increased academic achievement. Differentiated instruction is a method of teaching that requires teachers to comprehend and observe the similarities and differences of the students they teach (Roy, Guay, & Valois, 2013). Recognizing these differences and similarities can provide teachers with a plan to improve learning for each student. According to O'Connor and

Angus (2012), teachers who provide learning opportunities and strategies develop objectives that monitor student progress. Section 1 of this paper includes a discussion of the problem, evidence of the problem, a definition of terms, research questions, and the significance of the study.

### **Definition of the Problem**

In a Title I urban elementary school of approximately 610 students located in a school district in Kentucky, ELLs did not meet the required educational state standards for the year 2013-2014. The results of the Kentucky Performance Rating for Exceptional Progress (K – PREP) indicated that ELLs scored 12% lower on the assessment than nonimmigrant students. School administrators and teachers are concerned about this problem because it may mean that ELL students are not achieving academically and, as a result, the school might face a reduction of state funding for educational programs at the school.

The context of the problem describes what the school has in place to assist approximately 190 ELLs to become academically successful. The local school has two English as a Second Language (ESL) units or classrooms designed for students who are recommended by their regular classroom teacher for work with the ESL teacher. The six ESL teachers work in these units with students in small groups or one-on-one sessions in 40-minute sessions daily.

According to the local paper, students within the school speak approximately 70 languages as their first language. Because the majority of the ELLs currently enrolled speak little or no English, the ESL teachers focus mainly on vocabulary and other literacy



skills such as reading. The staff also includes one bilingual teacher who speaks Spanish fluently. The bilingual teacher assists the classroom teacher with writing lessons and homework directions and makes all home contacts with parents. Sometimes older siblings are asked to come into younger students' classrooms to assist the teacher in explaining required assignments. The ESL teacher and the bilingual teacher have the responsibility to help ELLs with required grade assessments.

Contributing factors to the problem may be that primary teachers in this school do not have the training or adequate preparation time to develop lesson plans and activities that focus on activities that differentiate instruction for ELLs. Teachers new to the education profession may not have had experience in working in a school that is mostly a multicultural learning environment. Britto (2012) emphasized that mastering language and literacy often requires an understanding of a certain set of skills needed to achieve academic success and lifelong learning. Preparing lessons for individual students and varying ability groups can be challenging for teachers; however, with consistent practices and lesson modifications, the final outcome can produce differentiated instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners such as ELLs. Opportunities to implement research-based instructional strategies can assist educators with accountability for ELLs. Mizell (2010) stated that differentiated instruction is a foundation that can improve student learning, increase self-esteem, and create a positive attitude about school.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The test results of the 2013–2014 K-PREP indicated that 52.4% of ELLs scored at the novice level in literacy. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 explained that states may not exclude ELLs from state testing. Therefore, in 2006, Kentucky joined the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium to meet the NCLB requirement of a yearly ELL English language proficiency assessment (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment provides Kentucky with a placement test as well as a yearly assessment entitled ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State) for ELLs. This assessment is used to determine annual English proficiency gains for all ELLs in Grades K to 12 (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). Student test scores in this school district declined during the 2014–2015 school year. Data released by the Kentucky Department of Education show that after 3 consecutive years of posting gains, only 73 of the districts' 138 tested schools met their annual performance goals set by the state. According to the Kentucky Department of Education (2016), the school under study did not meet the academic goals for school years 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. The accountability performance classification for this school indicates that the school scored below proficient, and there is a need for improvement. Classification category requires a test score of 72.8 for distinguished and 67.2 for proficient. The school under study scored 62.7 for school year 2014–2015 and 52.8 for school year 2015–2016.

According to the data from the school report card, low tests scores of the school under study is an indication the students are not performing on their grade levels. This is a concern for the state and district school boards, school administrator, teachers, and parents. Local school districts charge educators with the job of building an ideal learning setting for any student with educational needs, including students with diverse needs. The school district faces penalties when schools fail to make annual yearly progress. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of differentiating instruction for ELLs.

Although differentiated instruction has positive outcomes, there seems to be a gap in the literature that examines the implementation of differentiated instruction in classrooms. Doubet (2012) stated, "In a differentiated classroom, assessment is on-going and diagnostic" (p. 37). The complexity of implementing differentiated instruction surfaces when teachers are required to write lesson plans that mediate instruction for diverse students, including specific student groups, such as ELLs. Tomlinson (2000) stated that students in the elementary grades vary widely, and if teachers want to maximize their students' individual capabilities, they will have to address the differences.

### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

The ELL population continues to grow more rapidly than the student population as a whole. There are more than 4 million ELLs enrolled in public schools in kindergarten through 12th grade (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education [NCES], 2014). ELLs are often in classrooms with teachers who do not have specialized training to meet their needs. Krummel (2013) emphasized that preservice

teachers continue to graduate ill prepared for teaching students of diverse cultures. Moreover, Miller and Mikulec (2014) stated that preservice teachers are immersed in educational settings that are very different from their own. The NCES (2014) further noted that students who are identified as ELLs often perform poorly on standardized tests and struggle to attain academic success. Therefore, ELLs face the challenging task of mastering a new language while striving to learn subject-area content. Kim and Garcia (2014) further stated that a lack of proficiency in English could have adverse effects on ELLs, such as reading difficulties, placement in special education programs, under preparation to enter secondary schools, and dropping out of high school. Classrooms across the United States are seeking educational approaches to assist with increasing academic growth of students. State legislative mandates and the annual progress of all students have become a major concern and focus for teachers. It is critical to student success in the classroom and on standardized testing that educators understand and implement differentiated instruction while keeping in mind the different learning abilities of individual students. Tomlinson (2012) suggested that differentiated instruction appears to be a way to reach individual students, no matter what the readiness, the diverse background, or the interest of the student. Kennedy, Wheeler, and Bennett (2014) wrote that the monoculture approach to teaching no longer provides the appropriate approach to student success. Furthermore, teachers must be able to recognize students' learning preferences and have the ability to differentiate reading instruction in order to address what students need to achieve success in the classroom (Benson, 2014; Reiss, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011).

## **Effective Differentiated Instruction Studies**

In a study conducted by Morgan (2014), results revealed that students will have increased motivation and achieve more when they have differentiated activity choices based on their interests and strengths. Logan (2011) revealed the results of a qualitative study involving 141 teachers. The results indicated that differentiated instruction offered a meaningful way to teach required criteria for state standards (Logan, 2011).

According to Valiandes (2015), in a quasi-experimental study that examined the effects of differentiated instruction on student learning in mixed ability classrooms, results revealed that classrooms in which differentiated instructional strategies were implemented, students made better improvements compared to students who were in classrooms in which differentiated instruction was not implemented. Valiandes concentrated on the problem of student diversity. The study participants involved were 24 teachers and 479 Grade 4 elementary students. When ELLs have opportunities to interact during the learning process, their classroom time is productive.

Alamillo, Padilla, and Arenas (2011) conducted a study in an elementary school in which 34% of the students were ELLs. They found that the teachers did not feel that they were sufficiently prepared to teach ELLs (Alamillo et al., 2011). In addition, the teachers felt they had received training in methods that were not effective in improving ELLs' academic achievement (Alamillo et al., 2011). Moreover, the teachers felt they needed more knowledge that focused on the needs of their ELLs students (Alamillo et al., 2011). Alamillo et al. concluded that the teachers needed to redesign the curriculum to give teachers a better understanding of how to meet the educational challenges of ELLs.

Reiss et al. (2011) conducted a study on the effects of differentiated instruction in reading comprehension and fluency. The study sites were five elementary schools with students who had difficulty in reading comprehension (Reiss et al., 2011). The results from the study suggested that differentiated instruction enrichment reading activities had a positive effect on increasing reading comprehension, which leads to higher achievement in reading fluency performance assessments (Reiss et al., 2011).

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher's implementation of differentiating instruction for ELLs in inclusive classrooms. By focusing on effective differentiated strategies and developing goals to assist students with academic achievement, teachers will be able to plan their lesson plans and modify instruction to help students become more successful. The intent of the study was to explore different strategies that will assist teachers to cultivate and challenge ELL's readiness, interests, and academic growth. Kobelin (2009) explained that the implementation of differentiated instruction forces teachers to adapt, change, experiment, and develop educational practices to meet the needs of all students. Altering instructional materials, cooperative learning groups or questioning methods based on individual student needs, gleaned from daily assessments and interaction, the differentiating instruction may aid in the foundation of ELLs academic success.

### **Definitions**

*Common Core Standards:* Refers to the skills all students should be introduced in each grade level through high school that covers English, language arts, and math. These

standards outline learning objectives in which school district leaders design their curriculums (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

*Differentiated instruction:* A teaching method used to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers accomplish differentiation in the learning environment by using on-going assessment and flexible grouping (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008).

*English language learner:* A student who comes from a non-English speaking home or background and has limited knowledge of the English language (Bowman-Perrott, Herrera, & Murry, 2010). Immigrant youth refers to children who have at least one foreign-born parent (Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

*Inclusive classroom:* A classroom or learning environment in which the teacher creates flexibility in lessons, activities, learning stations, and student grouping for students who have different learning styles and abilities (Gibson, 2010).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB):* Ensures that all students who attend public school will improve their educational outcomes and academic performance. NCLB requires students to be tested in Grades 3 to 8 and once in high school in reading and math (Ametepee, Tchinsala, & Agbeh, 2014).

*Zone of proximal development:* The difference in time between what a learner can do and accomplish independently without help and what a learner can do and accomplish with help (Wass & Golding, 2014).

### **Significance**

The significance of this study derives from the added knowledge teachers may gain from implementing differentiated instruction for this Title I urban elementary school

in Kentucky. Implementing differentiated instruction may be the alternative approach teachers use to improve declining test scores for ELLs this school district. With the rapid change in the face of American classrooms, teachers need to know how to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the individual needs of all of their students. Alavinia and Farhady (2012) stated, “Teachers worldwide agree that students are identified by individual differences and abilities” (p. 72). Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) explained that differentiated instruction is an instructional approach that includes a variety of strategies, not just one strategy. This study may aid teachers who implement the differentiated instruction model in their classrooms with a collaboration of support staff and other professionals to create an optimal learning experience for all students. Teachers’ perceptions of differentiated instruction for this Kentucky school district are significant to meet the diverse needs of ELLs. ELLs may suffer the consequences of not having their individual needs met in the classroom when teachers fail to incorporate effective differentiated teaching strategies. The findings in this study may encourage teachers to create a learning environment in which the classroom becomes a place where diverse students experience academic success. Individual experiences of successful differentiation were documented and shared with other educators, school administrators, and stakeholders.

This study can effect social change as teachers adapt and modify their curriculums, lesson plans, assessments, and student grouping in ways that will be most beneficial to their students. The results of this study may affect local schools by providing data that can create an awareness of teachers’ needs when working with all



students. Curriculum writers and school administrators throughout the district may have opportunities to share differentiated instructional strategies that result in improved academic achievement because of changing the delivery and routine of traditional instruction. Students who are below grade level may experience improved academic achievement within the inclusive classroom. Students who are on grade level, through differentiated instruction, will have opportunities to be challenged to learn concepts and skills that are beyond the basic lesson expectations or goals.

Differentiated instruction is a strategy that can assist other teachers of ELLs in this school and district with developing their students' interests and abilities to the highest potential so that they may experience academic growth. With continued implementation of differentiated instruction from well-trained teachers, the findings of this study may assist educators in other areas of the district where ELLs are not scoring well on state assessments. Finally, the project created from this study could be used as an example to introduce inexperienced teachers of ELLs or new teachers entering the field of education with the objectives of best practices strategies of differentiated instruction.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

In an urban elementary school in a southern state, ELLs are not meeting the required state standards on state assessments in reading. Moreover, teachers of these students may not be effectively implementing differentiated instruction that may assist with increasing academic growth of ELLs. Research has shown that differentiated instruction offers a meaningful way to teach required criteria for state standards. Supporting the positive effects of differentiated instruction on students of various cultural

backgrounds, educators need to create a challenging environment that will employ a clear purpose for increasing the academic achievement of ELLs. Teachers of ELLs should have an opportunity to incorporate differentiated instruction into their teaching practices. For students' successful academic achievement to occur, teachers need additional professional development to assist with adapting their curriculums to meet student needs. Considering these thoughts, the research questions focused on the importance of implementing differentiated instruction as a teaching strategy for ELLs. This study was designed to address the following questions:

1. What are elementary teachers' perceptions of working with ELLs?
2. How do elementary teachers differentiate instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom?
3. What professional development do elementary teachers need to provide differentiated instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

The initial search for the literature review began by identifying a conceptual framework that addressed teachers' preparation, practices, and benefits of using differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with varying learning abilities. Topics researched for this study included differentiated strategies, inclusive classroom teachers and ELLs, creating ELL programs, preparing teachers for diversity, differentiated instruction for ELLs, flexible grouping, and differential instruction and social change. McCullough (2011) commented that children's educational outcomes

might increase if teachers adapt their lessons that capitalize on student interests, abilities, and experiences. As students retain skills and concepts, more practice leads to improvement and academic advancement. Grant (2009) pointed out that the reinforcement of positive attitudes towards learning is one of the aspects that contributes and can result in student higher academic achievement for students.

Articles to support the literature review came from the Walden University Library and Galileo. The range of search for information on the topic expands greater than 5 years, 2013 to 2018. The research sources that are older than 5 years provide insight and relevancy on the study topic. The older sources, particularly the seminal sources used in the conceptual framework, assisted in describing the research that generates a body of knowledge on the study topic that is in the literature review. The Walden Library is a gateway to multiple databases, such as Thoreau, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest Central. The following terms were used: *teacher's perceptions for differentiated instruction, immigrant youth, diversity, Carol Tomlinson, Vygotsky, zone of proximal development*, and *English Language Learner*. The combination of the Boolean phrases and databases provided a rich supply of literature that enabled saturation for the conceptual frameworks and literature review.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of differentiated instruction for this study is based on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction. The comparison of Vygotsky's ZPD theory and Carol Ann Tomlinson explanation of differentiated instruction provides a lens for analyzing and

interpreting the data for this study. According to Shyman (2012), students' needs vary, just as the educational support for each student should vary. If the student is challenged and provided the appropriate tools that complement student learning, academic success can be achieved. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development" (p. 86), which is measured using problem solving under the guidance of an adult or more skilled peers.

Petty (2009) agreed that Vygotsky's ZPD provides the appropriate level and support to help younger, less capable learners acquire skills and knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) research on ZPD describes a zone where learning occurs when students are assisted in learning concepts and competencies in the classroom. Vygotsky contended that the greater the students' ZPD, the greater his or her potential learning. With the help of ZPD, teachers can determine not only the mental capabilities that have previously been developed in students but also the functions that are still in the process of developing.

Teachers who adopt Vygotsky's ZPD understand that some students do better when working together with more capable students to learn and internalize new concepts, retain skills, complete tasks, and solve problems. The premise is that after completing the task collaboratively, students will likely be able to complete the same task independently next time. Through this process of working alone, students' ZPD level for the assigned task increases. Moreover, students who transition from being helped to working independently experience changes in learning gradually. Strategies that can help

eliminate assistance in the classroom may include group activities, scaffolding, and other plans that will support student learning.

The positive relationship between students and teachers can produce, maintain, and establish a successful interactive ZPD. Therefore, as teachers establish and maintain students' ZPD, they create a safe and nurturing environment where students feel comfortable expressing their social and cultural concerns, revive prior knowledge and experience, transfer newly acquired information to long-term memory, and facilitate a positive learning experience and appreciation for the skills and concepts learned (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers who offer learning opportunities to students within their ZPD are encouraging and advancing individual learning. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD can be considered a foundation for differentiated instruction that ensures all students are accomplishing the same academic achievement; however, the process of obtaining academic success is unique for each student.

Tomlinson (2001) explained that there are four components of differentiated instruction: (a) content--which involves what students need to learn or how they will get access to the information being introduced or taught, (b) process--these are activities offered to involve students in understanding the content of the lesson, (c) product--includes a culminating project that requires students to demonstrate what they learned, and (d) the learning environment--entails the climate and atmosphere of the classroom. Teachers who include these components in their lesson plans develop and demonstrate ways that skills and concepts can be adjusted to meet the needs of students.

Differentiated instruction requires teachers to realize that all pupils vary in their readiness, interests, experiences, and prior knowledge. The question for U.S. classrooms is how teachers can successfully work with students of widely different abilities who are in the same classroom. Tomlinson (2000) pointed out that teachers have an educational challenge when students of varying levels of ability are in the same learning space. According to Tomlinson, the solution is differentiation.

Successful teachers of differentiated instruction focus on lesson outcomes and become facilitators who assist students with their learning. Students who experience success in differentiated classrooms must rely on previous knowledge and use critical thinking skills to develop their conclusions. Powell and Kalina (2009) noted that when people do not understand the knowledge that is presented, then they must build their knowledge based on earlier experiences.

Academic support varies when implementing differentiated instruction. Sometimes to get students to certain points, it becomes necessary to involve other staff members such as the media specialist, the computer teacher, the ESL teacher, and the services of a community resource. Tomlinson (2001) explained that effective teachers use differentiated instruction as a guide.

Tomlinson (2000) remarked that differentiated instruction allows teachers to adjust their curriculum so that skills and concepts can be adapted to the needs of individual and diverse students who are in the same classroom. Maximizing achievement and growth for all students in the learning process are an educational approach to differentiated instruction. When teachers vary their teaching and instructional methods to

create the best learning experience possible and students can work without assistance, learning has occurred (Tomlinson, 2011). Vygotsky's ZPD and Tomlinson's teaching methods of differentiated instruction view the student-teacher relationship as collaborative. Teachers create lessons that extend student knowledge and can encourage students to move to the next level in their academic growth. Moreover, teachers can offer students another opportunity to engage in learning by modifying tasks that are suitable for each student's learning ability. Being the researcher in this study, it was my intent to acknowledge the restructuring of traditional teaching through the implementation of differentiated instruction by teachers of ELLs.

Teachers who implement differentiated instruction are aware that students are different and need modified teaching strategies that will increase academic growth (DeJesus, 2012). Effective teachers design classrooms that provide work areas in which students are actively involved in learning activities. Classroom teachers use principles of differentiation with classwork that is appropriate for individual student needs. The challenge for teachers is to provide learning opportunities that are inclusive and effective (Villa & Thousand, 2017). Teachers become facilitators who will assist and support learning. DeJesus (2012) further stated that parents of students who received instruction in classrooms where differentiated instruction was implemented were proud of their child's improved academic achievement. According to Gaitas and Alves Martins (2017), differentiation allows teachers to reach all students through individualized assessments and instruction. Administrators can boast of being the head of a successful school.

**Differentiated Instruction for ELLs**

ELLs enter schools with varying levels of English proficiency. Britto (2012) mentioned that mastering language and literacy often requires an understanding of a certain set of skills needed to learn, work, and function successfully in school. The literacy of ELLs is vital to their academic achievement. Turkan and Buzick (2014) stated that combining learning, instruction, and school policies can guide teachers of ELLs with their classroom instruction. Moreover, Baecher et al. (2012) emphasized that schools cannot delay introducing academic skills and content in ELLs. According to Tran (2015), ELLs face the challenge of understanding the curriculum content. These students need to increase their knowledge in content areas that will allow full and successful participation in all learning activities. Teachers can implement differentiated instruction as an approach to meet the educational needs of a specific group of students rather than the whole class. This approach allows the teacher to alter learning activities that will guide success in academic growth for ELLs.

Researchers have shown that teachers should use flexibility in teaching ELLs. Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) stated that students have different learning abilities. Flexibility in teaching allows teachers to provide students with opportunities to work and learn in various ways. Using a variety of teaching strategies may improve academic performance for all students, including ELLs, who have difficulties speaking and understanding the dominant language spoken in the classroom. In earlier research, Martin and Green (2012) stated that research supports that ELLs can lower their inhibitions, become more exposed to the targeted language, and can positively strengthen their



academic performance when they spend time cooperatively working with English speaking students. The implementation of differentiated instruction may challenge ELLs to become more accountable for their own learning. To accomplish student accountability, teachers need to create a supportive learning environment that motivates students to want to learn and achieve. Implementing practical approaches and modifying engaging, differentiated instruction may strengthen ELLs' ability to do better academically. Implementing differentiated instruction takes time. Teachers need sufficient time to plan, locate, and gather materials and equipment that can adequately meet the needs of all students (Shepherd & Acosta-Tello, 2015).

### **Flexible Grouping**

Differentiated instruction has been embedded in the American educational system since the existence of the one-room rural schoolhouse. It was during this time that the teacher was challenged to teach students of various ages, backgrounds, and learning abilities. To meet the needs of students successfully, the teacher had to frequently group and regroup students. Today's teachers face similar challenging circumstances in their classrooms. When using the flexible grouping model, teachers can decide upon a variety of grouping patterns that can enhance learning. Flexible grouping may consist of large groups, small groups, teams, partners, individuals, student-led groups, and teacher-led groups. Flexible grouping provides opportunities for students who have similar learning abilities to work together (Cox, 2018). Flexible grouping can offer strategies that coincide with the different stages of proficiency in the language for ELLs (Diaz-Rico, 2017). Furthermore, flexible grouping allows teachers to create and personalize materials to

meet the academic goals of each student. Groups are formed and dissolved according to specific goals, activities, and individual student needs.

Benders and Craft (2016) noted research shows that ELLs may need various interventions such as flexible grouping to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Flexible grouping builds skills and attitudes that can prepare students to work effectively in a global society (Perry, 2012). Some benefits of flexible grouping for ELLs may include increased motivation and academic achievement, growth in problem-solving and communication skills, and student ownership of learning (Perry, 2012). These benefits allow teachers to maximize the instructional time that can address appropriate learning goals for all students. As noted by Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) flexibility in teaching allows teachers to facilitate many opportunities for making sure all students are learning to their potential.

### **Differentiated Instructional Strategies**

Differentiated instructional strategies are designed to assist teachers in implementing high-quality instruction for a diverse group of students in the same classroom. Taylor (2015) stated that when students are taught at their readiness level using appropriate instructional strategies, there is an increase in student achievement. Dixon, Yessel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014) explained that differentiated instruction is a complex process that classroom teachers can use to implement effective vocabulary strategies for ELLs. Student cultures should be supported linguistically and the individual needs of students should dictate the delivery of instruction that the teacher implements

(Snow & Matthews, 2016). Differentiated instructional strategies can help teachers meet educational mandates.

Dixon et al. (2014) further stated that differentiation involves teachers learning about each student to provide experiences and activities that improve academic performance. Heacox (2002) noted that the ability to assign work to subgroups using the same question and lesson objectives substantiates differentiated instruction. Evans and Waring (2011) provided the following list of strategies that can assist with creating meaningful lessons to meet the needs and varied interests of ELLs: (a) use flexible grouping to organize students based on interests and ability; (b) create activities that target visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners; (c) create spaces for independent inquiry-based learning activities; (d) choose general instructional models and skills that allow for understanding at various levels of complexity; (e) supply various materials to target different reading abilities and learning preferences; and (f) make assessment an ongoing interactive process. Additionally, teachers' experiences in the classroom provide ways to modify instructional strategies that will meet the needs of diverse learners (Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, & Lindo, 2015).

### **Inclusive Classroom Teachers and ELLs**

Teachers in the inclusive classroom need an understanding of language differences and developmental stages associated with learning for ELLs. Teachers who work in inclusive classrooms restructure their teaching practices to accommodate the educational needs of every student. Villa and Thousand (2017) stated that inclusive education involves strategies that ensure learning is meaningful and purposeful.

Moreover, inclusive education helps eliminate barriers that block students from being successful (Villa & Thousand, 2017). According to Columbo, McMakin, Jacobs, and Shestok (2013), teachers must continuously add strategies to meet the needs of students who bring different cultures, languages, and abilities into the classrooms. ELLs need direct instruction and continuing practice when applying academic skills in content areas. Effective teachers in the inclusive classroom demonstrate flexibility for diversity of the learning process (Gibson, 2010). Differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom assists teachers in understanding what ELLs do not know. Tomlinson (2000) explained that differentiated instruction is an important aspect of creating a thriving inclusive classroom that enhances the lives of all children and requires teachers to consider planning and preparing classroom materials. Therefore, without compromising the integrity of the assignment, differentiated instruction offers ELLs the same depth of content knowledge as their English-speaking counterparts, using an alternate approach.

Teachers who implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms should establish strategies that develop ideas and skills that encourage positive attitudes towards learning. ELLs do not enter classrooms with the same needs, experiences, interests, and abilities. McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) pointed out that all students should have an equal opportunity to master the same skills, concepts, and content that are introduced by the teacher and are guided by the Common Core Standards. According to Frey and Fisher (2013), students should be presented with background knowledge prior to reading to learn new vocabulary and support comprehension of the text. Breiseth (2015) added that the three main strategies to support ELLs with reading comprehension are building

background knowledge, teaching vocabulary, and frequently checking ELLs' comprehension of the text. Gutierrez and Vanderwood (2013) examined the effects of students' literacy level on literacy performance and found using the students' phonemic awareness helped ELLs with reading skills in school. Moreover, inclusive classroom teachers must link new information to the prior knowledge ELLs bring to the classroom. Teachers in the inclusive classroom environment recognize that implementing differentiated instruction can give a starting point that can evaluate students' individual needs.

### **Instructional Needs and Practices for ELLs**

Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) noted that differentiated instruction incorporates active learning and student interest, which can spark an increase in student learning. To address the instructional needs of ELLs, Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) described the steps teachers can use to assist ELLs in experiencing academic growth and success. Steps include: (a) creating a classroom climate that is safe and orderly, (b) implementing instructional strategies that are known to be successful, (c) anticipate high but realistic expectations, (d) collaborate school and community partnerships, and (e) recognize student language and culture (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). McTighe and Wiggins (2013) noted that teachers can work together in groups to develop lessons and analyze what works in classrooms. Direct vocabulary instruction teaches students strategies to help them focus on the meaning of new words (Lightbrown, 2014). Ruiz Soto, Hooker, and Batalove (2015) stated that for ELLs to have a better understanding of lessons taught, teachers need to consistently use students' prior

knowledge. Teachers who use differentiated instruction to teach skills and content elevate students' learning potential (Tobin & Tippet, 2014).

### **Creating ELL Programs**

Cheatham and Yeonsun (2011) explained being unable to communicate with educators, ELLs might be reluctant to interact with teachers due to speech and comprehension limitations. Honigsfeld (2009) remarked that with the increasing number of ELLs elementary school educators need to implement in their schools and communities an ELL program. According to Webster and Valeo (2011), ELLs' related knowledge is the exclusive domain of ESL/ELL specialists. Galindo (2011) mentioned that these professionals understand the personal history of ELLs and know how to connect these students' learning with educational goals. However, such understanding is necessary for all teachers who plan to successfully educate ELLs.

An ESL program is designed to assist ELLs with academic and language instruction for the whole school day, or some portion of the school day, in English. However, Borden (2014) pointed out that parents of ELLs can deny bilingual services and have the option to enroll their children in English-only classrooms. Honigsfeld (2009) proposed the more proficient students become in English, the fewer hours they spend in the program with an ESL specialist. According to Pearson Education Inc. (2014), the basic skills lessons of the computer based program *Success Maker* has been used by ESL teachers to focus on students' individual weaknesses. ELLs benefit from small group instruction. Honigsfeld (2009) also added when developing appropriate learning opportunities, teachers should consider their students' diverse linguistic and

cognitive readiness levels. Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2013) explained the integration of strategies for English as a second language (ESL) with effective reading instructional strategies can provide ELLs with the help they need to develop literacy and language skills in a consistent manner. ESL programs are designed to provide vocabulary as a basis for spoken and written communication (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). The ESL specialist follows a specifically developed curriculum based on the participating students' academic need and individual language.

### **Preparing Teachers for Diversity**

Wells (2009) explained that the racial integration of schools and the education of ELLs in the United States are connected and the American education system must have objectives that will serve all children regardless of race, ethnicity, and language in acquiring an equal and high-quality education. Teacher training is important to ensuring all students are effectively served in the school setting. According to Caspe, Lopez, Chu, and Weiss (2011), 21st century teachers require new and different skills and knowledge to meet today's challenges, including the competencies and understanding to work with ELLs. Mason (2013) commented that K to 12 student achievements could improve when teachers feel competent in working with multicultural students. Orchard and Winch (2015) stated that one purpose of teacher training is to introduce and engage new teachers with educational theories. When teachers do not have the knowledge and skills it takes to assist ELLs in improving academically, they do not feel confident in working with culturally diverse students (Yoo, 2016). However, teachers with positive self-confidence

in their teaching practices have the ability to support and address the needs of ELLs (Li & Peters, 2016).

Effective educators recognize individual differences and needs of their students and strive to understand how to meet those needs. The achievement goals for ELLs and English-speaking students are similar and are connected with the knowledge and experience of their teachers (Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wyckoff, 2016). Zepeda, Castro, and Cronin (2011) commented that educators across the United States must be prepared to teach a diverse population of students. Diaz-Rico (2017) stated that because diverse students enroll with their own values, traditions, and language, it is essential that teachers develop an understanding of cultural diversity to help these students succeed. Teachers of ELLs should implement specific strategies for differentiated instruction that work effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse students. Effective teachers recognize that there are specific skills that teachers need to learn that are helpful to ELLs' achievement (Master et al., 2016).

Teachers need to reflect on how they must become agents of change (Borjian & Padilla, 2010). Teachers will need to research prior knowledge about ELLs such as (a) what skills the students know, (b) what they want to and need to know, and (c) how each student learns. Effective teachers will put forth efforts to modify their teaching strategies to include the differentiated instruction that will assist in their children's academic growth. Assigning ELLs to teachers whose methods are successful helps support ELLs' academic performance. Furthermore, effective, successful, and experienced teachers have learned how to adjust their teaching to meet student learning needs (Master et al., 2016).



Ertmer and Newby (2013) remarked that knowledge can be changed by the interactions between the learner and the environment that creates new knowledge. Additionally, to be an effective educator of culturally diverse students, teachers need to create a learning environment in which ELLs feel accepted and welcomed.

Productive and efficient teachers work to create educational strategies and programs that value the languages and cultures of ELLs (Borjian & Padilla, 2010). Rance-Rooney (2009) suggested teachers implement the following educational practices that are still applicable today to support improved achievement for ELLs: (a) acknowledge the diverse academic and linguistic needs of students in various ELL subgroups; (b) use the native languages of the families to reinforce English language development; (c) follow language development guidelines and assessments; (d) develop literacy-rich school settings; (e) use instructional strategies that combine language and content learning; and (f) teach language learning strategies to students. Teachers play a valuable role in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development when students enter a formal classroom setting (Lynch, 2010). Therefore, teachers who focus on developing differentiated skills that are necessary to increase academic performance can serve a wide range of multicultural students (Stevens & Miretzky, 2014).

### **Implications**

Through the implementation of differentiated instruction, student academic success can be achieved. The implications of this study may challenge teachers to document instructional strategies that can enrich and modify daily lesson objectives and activities to meet the varying needs of all students. A possible project from the findings

of the study could include a professional development workshop to assist teachers in implementing differentiated instruction. Professional development can help improve the quality of academic environments for learning and offer valuable resources that can improve academic achievement for ELLs. Another project could be to develop a curriculum plan with teachers that includes materials, units, and lessons for working with ELLs. The actual project appears in Appendix A.

### **Summary**

Teachers must work with a variety of students to ensure success in academic growth. Implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs allows the classroom teacher to modify and adapt lessons to the diverse needs of students. When teachers implement differentiated instructional strategies by providing choices for active participation, ELLs can make sense of what they are learning in the classroom. Adams, Womack, Shatzer, and Caldarella (2010) pointed out that the responsibility of teachers is to guide all students in developing appropriate approaches to learning that will assist with academic achievement. Levy (2008) noted that implementing differentiated instruction strategies goes further than assignments and assessments. Moreover, increased academic achievement from implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs can be accomplished with additional professional development training.

Section 2 will provide explanations justifying the choice of research design. An explanation of the selection process for participants, as well as, the methodology of the study will be defined. Additionally, a rationalization will be provided as to why this method was chosen as opposed to other designs that were not applicable. A detailed

explanation of data collection methods and analysis will be included in Section 2 of the project study. Section 3 includes a description and discussion of the project based on the data collected and analyzed. Section 4 includes the final reflection and conclusion of the project study.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The topic for this project study followed an element of basic qualitative research. Merriam (2009) stated, “Basic research is guided by an intellectual interest in an experience with the objective of broadening knowledge” (p. 3). Creswell (2009) pointed out that some social and human problems can be addressed and explored by using qualitative research. Creswell added that qualitative research involves emerging questions and processes, data collected in the participants’ setting, data analysis that generates themes, and interpretations of the meaning of the data. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2010), qualitative research focuses on giving voice to the opinions and perceptions of the research participants.

In this qualitative case study, I addressed how teachers describe their professional development needs in implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs to achieve academic success in the inclusive classroom. I identified differentiated instructional strategies that teachers can implement to assist ELLs with successful academic achievement. These instructional changes in the inclusive classroom of ELLs can be a positive effect on learning for students with varying levels of English proficiency. A qualitative method was used to research any differentiated instructional strategies being used in inclusive classrooms of ELLs. In this section, I describe the study’s sampling, design, data collection, data analysis procedures, and findings.

Upon reviewing other research designs, a case study method guided this research. A case study creates opportunities for the researcher to explore additional questions

through investigating a topic in detail and identifying a subject that allows for in-depth analysis in a natural setting using multiple sources of information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). This particular project study did not lend itself to developing a new theory; therefore, the grounded theory approach was an unacceptable choice of research design. Creswell (2012) stated that narrative researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals' lives, and include narratives about their experiences. The narrative design was not selected because in this project study I do not explore or describe the experiences and lives of people. Moreover, a quantitative design would be less effective because it is in numerical form. Statistical data alone would not provide the type of in-depth detail that could be learned qualitatively. Upon reviewing the components of the approaches previously mentioned, the case study method was the most appropriate choice to support the qualitative design of this research study.

### **Research Design and Approach**

According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative researcher characterizes exploring a problem and developing an understanding of the meaning, provides a literature review to justify the problem, states the purpose and research questions, and collects, analyzes, and interprets the data. The research process provides the reader with a rich descriptive product. Merriam (2009) proposed that qualitative researchers seek to understand, interpret, and correlate the experiences of individuals from their surroundings. The research questions that guided this study were as follows: (a) What are elementary teachers' perceptions of working with ELLs? (b) How do elementary teachers differentiate instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom? (c) What professional do

elementary teachers need to provide differentiated instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom?

Currently, in an urban public school district, teachers are striving to make efforts to understand how to meet the needs of the diverse populations represented in their classrooms. In this district, there is a need for more professional development to train new and experienced teachers in developing effective ways to help ELLs achieve academic success. During this project study, my intent was to investigate participants' perceptions and views about implementing differentiated instruction to ELLs. Included also is documentation of researcher and interviewees' interactions, an accurate account of opinions from participants, transcriptions, and descriptions of information from the data collection methods selected, and a detailed report of my findings.

Case studies focus on small groups or individuals within a group and the researcher records that group or individuals' experience in a particular setting (Lodico et al., 2010). Furthermore, the case study approach requires the researcher to collect data from multiple sources. For this qualitative study, a collective case study approach was selected to investigate teachers' perception of implementing differentiated instruction that can result in improved academic achievement for ELLs in the classroom. For this project study, I recruited eight participants: two first-grade teachers, two second-grade teachers, two third-grade teachers, and two ESL teachers.

Merriam (2009) emphasized that a researcher can implement the following six steps for case study research: (a) define and investigate the research questions, (b) select the case and choose the data collection and analysis procedures, (c) prepare for data

collection, (d) collect data in the research setting, (e) analyze and interpret the data, and (f) generate the report. In this project study, I explored teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instructional strategies that they believe are most effective in assisting ELLs with academic achievement.

As the researcher, I used interviews, documented lesson plans, and a survey to collect data. From the teacher interview data, I gleaned information about the advantages of differentiating instruction, professional development opportunities, implementation of differentiated instructional strategies that may ensure academic success for ELLs, forms of communication that connect teachers and students, resources needed to support differentiated instruction for ELLs, and the importance of differentiating instruction for all learners. Lesson plans provided evidence that teachers have modified or changed their teaching strategies to indicate that differentiated instruction has been implemented to assist with the increased academic achievement of ELLs. To determine if lesson plans provide evidence of change, I asked the teachers to elaborate on instructional changes that they made in their plans. Then, I documented in the lesson plan checklist whether lesson plan changes were evident.

As the researcher, I used member checking to verify the accuracy of the data collected during the face-to-face interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2011) emphasized that member checking can be used to validate triangulation. Member checking provided an opportunity to understand what the participants intended to convey during the interviews. Hatch (2010) commented that with member checking, participants may or may not be involved from beginning to end with the research. Hatch went on to say that

the relationship between the participants and the researcher will determine how much interaction is needed. My plan for member checking included follow-up meetings with each participant to review their individual written narratives of interviews. For the participants who could not meet face-to-face for the follow-up meeting, a telephone call was scheduled to review their summaries.

The choice of methodology allowed for the creation of strategies developed by teachers that can assist in implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. Glesne (2011) explained that a qualitative design supports a case study method that involves using data from interviews, lesson plan documentation, and member checking, which follows a comprehensive analysis of the collected data.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was a Title I urban elementary school located in a southern state. The school is composed of one principal, one assistant principal, one counselor, 22 regular classroom teachers, six ESL teachers, and one bilingual teacher. This multicultural learning environment has 608 students in grades prekindergarten through Grade 5. There are approximately 14 cultures represented among staff and students. Some of the cultures represented are Somalian, Portuguese, Korean, Iranian, Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Haitian, Mother Tongue (part of African language), Arabic, and Nepali. The anecdotal conversation with the assistant principal and school attendance secretary revealed that of the 608 students enrolled, 190 receive services from the ESL program.



## **Participants**

I recruited eight participants for this study. The participants included two of the three first grade teachers, two of the four second grade teachers, two of the four third grade teachers and two of the six ESL teachers for a total of eight teachers. I selected this group of teachers because there are more ELLs in the primary grades than in the other grades. The participants were selected based on availability, commitment to the study, and if they teach ELLs and differentiate instruction. Participation was voluntary, therefore; I selected teachers from each group who agreed to participate first, stopping when I had the planned number of participants per group. Gaining access to potential participants was relatively easy because I am a former educator of the school's faculty. I am familiar with the staff as a professional colleague from previous years. In addition, I am no longer a member of the school's faculty because I officially retired from the district in 2014. However, I requested permission from the school district to conduct a study of teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. Upon receiving permission from the school district, I contacted the principal of the local setting to request access to all primary teachers about participating in the study. The process of selecting potential participants for this study was convenience sampling. According to Lodico et al. (2010), convenience sampling is used when time and resources are limited and the study is restricted to a single school building or school district. Moreover, convenience sampling is a process in which the researcher chooses participants who are willing to participate in the study and are available. Next, I contacted teachers to explain my research and invite each potential recruit to become a participant.

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

I submitted a research ethics review application to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviews proposals for research to determine if ethical issues have been considered (Lodico et al., 2010). The function of the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of human research participants recruited to participate in research studies while advancing knowledge and facilitating the highest quality research. Research ethics is an important responsibility the researcher has to the participants in the study and the professions they represent (Lodico et al., 2010).

Upon receiving IRB approval from Walden University (IRB Approval # 05-22-17-0257342), I submitted IRB forms to the school district for review and approval. After the school district granted permission, I approached the local school administrator for permission to contact potential participants. I scheduled a meeting with teachers to explain the study topic and make a request for their participation. After receiving acceptance from the teachers to participate in the study, I asked each participant to read, sign, and return an informed consent form immediately. Through the informed consent process, participants were informed of the planned research as well as any potential risks and how the benefits would outweigh the stated risks involved while being a study participant. Participants were informed that they may withdraw at any time from the study with no repercussions. Finally, an explanation of the procedures for protecting the study's records was discussed with participants. Records for the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet for 5 years. After the 5-year period, all records will be destroyed. Conforming to the policies of Walden University's IRB, and while awaiting permission to

conduct the study, I had no contact with potential participants regarding any aspect of the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am a retired teacher from the local school district in which the study was conducted. Before conducting the study, I received permission from the school district and the principal of the study site to recruit participants for my data collection. The study site is the elementary school that I retired from; therefore, gaining access to the building and the participants did not pose any problems. As the researcher, I had the responsibility to conduct a project study concerning teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. I collected data for my research using surveys and semi-structured interviews. I also collected documentation from the participants in the form of lesson plans. The lesson plans served as evidence that differentiated instructional strategies were being implemented in inclusive classrooms. The participants and I scheduled interview dates, times, and locations. Participants had the choice of face-to-face or phone interviews. I analyzed all of the data.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers collect various types of data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than depend on a single data source (Creswell, 2009). The researcher then has the decision as to which data relate best to the topic and are to be included in the study. The face-to-face interviews for this study were conducted at locations selected by the participants or by phone to eliminate participants' feelings of being uncomfortable. Conducting the interviews on the phone or face-to-face away from

the local school allowed the participants to give their experiences, opinions, and thoughts without the fear of being overheard by other staff members or administration. As the researcher conducting the interviews, I did not ask any questions in a manner that would lead or change the participants' views, perceptions, or opinions about the study topic. I spoke calmly and asked questions slowly and distinctly so that participants would respond in a like manner. I reminded the participants that the interviews would be recorded and that their identity would not be attached to any forms. I used high-quality audio tapes and well-maintained recording equipment. Furthermore, it was my responsibility to listen attentively to demonstrate an interest in the participants' responses. The semi-structured interviews for primary teachers of ELLs in Grades 1, Grades 2, and Grades 3 consisted of 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The semi-structured interviews for ESL teachers consisted of 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Each interview took approximately 40 minutes. Merriam (2009) wrote the characteristics of a semi-structured interview include specific data that are sought after and issues that need exploring which guide the largest portion of the interview. The purpose of interviewing in qualitative research is to allow researchers the opportunity to consider another persons' perception of the topic of interest (Patton, 2002). The guided, structured questions were a way to guarantee that each interview was consistent when comparing responses. Prior to each interview, I reminded each participant that he or she was free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences of any kind.

Audio recordings of the interviews were used to guarantee accurate transcription of each interview. Upon completion of each interview, I transcribed the information from each interview verbatim and each tape was properly stored. Member checking was used to verify the accuracy of the data given during the interviews. Member checking is a method that allows participants an opportunity to give feedback on the researchers' temporary interpretation of the findings. Transcript reviews as a part of member checking with each participant took approximately 30 minutes.

An open-ended survey was used to collect data (see Appendix D). Lodico et al. (2010) stated that comparing various forms of data assist in validating the study findings. The survey was demographic. The survey was composed of questions designed to obtain background information about each participant such as education level, years of teaching experience, grade levels taught, what sources they use to develop differentiated instructional lessons, professional development experience, and their definition of differentiated instruction. The survey was a paper copy and took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

The final method for collecting data was documentation. I requested from each participant one copy of a lesson plan, which indicated a modification or change in lesson strategies that incorporated differentiated instruction for all students in an inclusive classroom including ELLs. The lesson plan collection took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to submit via email. I used a lesson plan rubric (see Appendix E) to show evidence that weekly lesson plans included differentiated instructional practices. Castro (2015) commented that effective teacher lessons differentiate instruction through the use

of various strategies that identify the needs of ELLs based on academic strengths and challenges. Additionally, I took notes to document the strategies that teachers indicated were effective. The information gathered from the interviews, surveys, and lesson plan documents allowed me to triangulate the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an ongoing activity with multiple steps that assist in identifying procedures relevant to the researcher's project. The collected data for this project study involved surveys, semi-structured interviews, and lesson plans. I chose to analyze the data from the interviews by hand coding.

### **Surveys**

The first method that I used to collect data was an open-ended survey (see Appendix D). This survey was demographic and included questions about the participants' perceptions of differentiated instruction. The survey included questions about participants' highest level of education, number of years teaching experience, professional development attendance, grade level assignment, and teacher certification. I used Question 5 to calculate approximately the number of primary students enrolled in inclusive classrooms. Question 6 was used to determine the amount of professional development training the participants had (if any) in preparing to work in a multicultural learning environment. I used the information from Question 7 to obtain each participants' perception of the meaning of differentiated instruction. Question 8 was used to learn if lesson strategies were created by the participants or if their strategies were from a published source or a combination of both. The participants were given a paper copy of

the survey and took no longer than 15 to 20 minutes to complete. I informed each participant not to include any personal information in their survey responses that could be identifiable. Although I was available to answer or clarify any questions, each participant responded to the survey independently. I manually tallied the responses to the demographic questions and provide that information in a table in the Data Analysis Results section.

### **Interviews**

After collecting data from each participant interview, I transcribed each interview. Transcribing the interviews took place immediately after each interview and took approximately three hours. After the interviews were completed and transcribed, a number was placed on each participants' interview response sheet and folder to protect the identity of each participant. Following this procedure allowed me to focus on the data provided by the participant. Creswell (2012) stated to organize data, the researcher may use files or computer folders. Therefore, to help analyze the data, I created a Microsoft Word document to record and sort the analyzed data. My data analysis process coincided with the six steps recommended by Creswell (2012) for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. Creswell's six steps are: (a) exploring data by coding, (b) using codes to locate themes, (c) using codes to develop a general idea of the data, (d) representing findings through narratives and visuals, (e) implementing strategies to validate findings, and (f) interpreting the meaning of the results.

The objective of coding qualitative data is to identify themes, patterns, concepts, insights, and understanding that consistently emerge throughout the data that are

collected (Creswell, 2012). Before trying to locate themes, I reread each interview transcript to get a clear understanding of what each participant intended to convey. Using the steps suggested by Creswell (2012) for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data, I implemented the following steps: (a) to explore the collected data by coding I used different colored highlighter pens; (b) to locate themes I used different colored highlighter pens to indicate similar words and phrases that appeared multiple times; (c) I used coding to highlight evidence of differentiated instruction being implemented; (d) I transcribed each interview in narrative form; (e) I used the quotes from the participants as to how differentiated instruction was being used to validate the findings; (f) and I interpreted the meaning of the results to develop my project.

According to Glesne (2011), the data analysis consists of organizing what the researcher has read, heard, and observed. In this particular study, I used a general inductive analysis because the study consisted of open-ended interview questions. Emerging themes from this study were a result of identifying and reviewing similar responses from the participants. Reviewing and rereading the themes and codes was a method to ensure the findings of the study were accurate. The interpreted findings were written in narrative form to provide the reader with a view of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of implementing differentiated instruction as a learning strategy to improve academic achievement for ELLs.

### **Lesson Plans**

I collected a lesson plan from each participant. Each participant's lesson plan was numbered according to who it belonged to. For example, Participant 1's lesson plan was



numbered 1 and Participant 2's plan was numbered 2. I used a lesson plan rubric to show evidence of teachers' implementation of differentiated instruction (see Appendix E). The lesson plans were used to show evidence of ways the participants address ELLs' learning and how the teachers implemented differentiated instruction to address Research Question 2. I was also able to compare the information provided in the lesson plans to the information collected from the participants' responses to the interview questions.

### **Procedure for Keeping Track of Data**

A reflective journal was used to record days and dates of the interviews. I also recorded the times, lengths of the interviews, and the location of the interviews. I used the reflective journal to record my experiences during this research process. Transcribing the interviews took place immediately after each interview. Following this process was beneficial in assisting me in identifying similar responses of the participants. This process also aided in being able to clearly identify and formulate my themes.

### **Procedure for Recording Data**

I purchased a cassette tape recorder and cassette tapes to record the interviews. All of the interviews were recorded on one side of the cassette tape and labeled. I used the same tape recorder to record the telephone interviews using the microphone built inside of the tape recorder. I also used an iPhone as a backup to record interviews in case the tape recorder malfunctioned.

### **Evidence of Quality and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research involves four components of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following paragraphs, I discuss

each of these components. I also discuss the steps that I took to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the data.

### **Credibility**

Credibility, according to Morrow (2005), refers to accurately communicating what the researcher discovered through implementing prolonged engagement with participants. As a former member of the staff, I was familiar with the learning environment of the study site. I chose to select participants from different grade levels to provide a variety of responses that would be related to the study topic. I triangulated the data using interviews, surveys, and lesson plan documentation. Moreover, to ensure credibility, I transcribed the interviews verbatim as given by each participant.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the reader can generalize the findings of the study. According to Merriam (2009), when researchers provide detailed descriptions, the findings become more realistic and valuable. To ensure transferability, I used supportive documentation, vivid details, rich, thick descriptions, and verbatim quotes from the participants to describe the findings.

### **Dependability**

Dependability deals with the way in which the researcher conducts the study. There should be consistency in the methods, context, participants, and analysis techniques which will produce similar findings should the study be conducted by other researchers. As the researcher, I wrote the components of my project study in a manner in which another researcher would have a guide to follow that should result in similar

findings. I included a detailed description of my research process as a path for researching differentiated instruction as an intervention for ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability addresses the issue that findings should represent the research topic. The researcher must combine the data, analysis procedure, and findings in a way that the reader can confirm the adequacy of the results. Morrow (2005) noted that confirmability demonstrates that the work is free of the researcher's biases and acknowledges that the researcher must remain objective throughout the study. During this study, I suppressed any biases that I may have had that might affect the results of my study. I accomplished this by not communicating any preconceived notions about my topic to the participants. I conducted the interviews using a prepared list of questions, making notes using the participants own words. I also remained respectful and non-judgmental during the interview process.

In qualitative research, one procedural perspective, according to Creswell (2009) for research is to identify and discuss one or more strategies used to check the accuracy of the findings. Validation of findings is obtained through member checking, triangulation, and an external audit (Creswell, 2012). The use of member checking assisted in determining the accuracy of qualitative findings by taking the final report back to the participants to review if the participants feel that the conclusions are accurate (Creswell, 2009). Each participant was emailed a copy of his or her interview responses to the open-ended questions. Next, I contacted each participant and scheduled a follow-up

meeting to review his or her transcripts. During the meetings with each participant, I reviewed and discussed each interview question and the exact responses given by the participants. Each of the meetings lasted about 30 minutes. Two of the follow up meetings were in person and six of the meetings were phone calls. All of the follow-up meetings ended with each participant satisfied that their responses to the interview questions were transcribed accurately.

Finally, I used a peer reviewer to read and obtain feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of my study. The peer reviewer is a former classmate who has experience in qualitative data analysis and has received her educational doctorate degree. The peer reviewer does not reside in the study school district; thus, identification of participants was not an issue. However, the peer reviewer did not have access to any identifying participant information. As a requirement from Walden University, the peer reviewer also read and signed a confidentiality agreement.

### **Discrepant Cases**

As the researcher, I understand that discrepant cases may emerge during the study. Identifying and analyzing discrepant data adds to the credibility and validity of the study (Creswell, 2012). I reviewed the collected data carefully to diminish any risk of unintentionally overlooking a discrepant case. If discrepant data had occurred during this study, I would have included the information in the research findings to allow readers to evaluate the data and draw their own conclusions. The findings in this project study were consistent among all participants. All participants commented that professional

development was an accurate statement of what is needed. There were no discrepant cases found.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. During this study, I explored teachers' perceptions of working with ELLs, various differentiated instructional strategies, and professional development as a support to assist teachers in modifying their teaching practices. I also investigated elements of the participants' perceptions that prevented differentiated instruction from being successfully implemented for ELLs. I used surveys, semi-structured interviews, and lesson plans for the data sources. The interviews served as the main source of data. The surveys were used to collect demographic information on the participants and the lesson plans as evidence of the participants' use of differentiated instruction.

Information was collected from eight participants who work in a Kentucky school district. Each participant was assigned a number for easy identification. Data were analyzed by hand-coding participants' responses to open-ended questions and documentation. I used different colored highlighters to identify similar word patterns, phrases, and perceptions. I categorized the responses from the participants' interviews. Using some of the survey questions as probing questions allowed me to obtain more specific information from each participant. The answers from the probing questions were written in the margin of paper with the assigned number for each participant. Lesson plan

documentation from the participants was given the same number that matched the surveys and interviews questions.

In this section, I will first present the demographic information for the eight participants. Next, I will present the themes that were derived from the interview and lesson plan data. Lastly, I will use the interview and lesson plan data to address the responses to the three research questions: (a) What are elementary teachers' perceptions of working with ELLs? (b) How do elementary teachers differentiate instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom? (c) What professional development do elementary teachers need to provide differentiated instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom? Finally, I will discuss the three themes that emerged from the findings: (a) differentiation is crucial for ELL instruction, (b) teachers use varied instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of ELLs, and (c) teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs.

### **Participant Demographics**

In this section, I will present the demographic information from the surveys completed by the eight participants. The participants included six female and two male teachers. The number of years of teaching experience ranges from 6 to 24 years. The average number of students in the classrooms is 24. The level of education for the teachers includes seven Master's degrees and one Reading Specialist degree. The participants were two teachers of Grade 1, two teachers of Grade 2, two teachers of Grade 3, and two ESL teachers. Certifications of the teachers are in regular education. There were no special education teachers involved in the study. Two of the participants

serve a total of 138 ELL students twice per week for 30 minutes. See Table 1 for the demographic break down of the information.

Table 1

*Demographics*

Participants	Grade level	Current teaching certification	Male or Female	Years of teaching experience	Number of students	Highest level of education
1	3	Regular education	Female	24	24	Master's Degree
2	2	Regular education	Male	10	24	Master's Degree
3	2	Regular education	Female	18	24	Master's Degree
4	ESL	Regular education	Male	15	75	Master's Degree
5	3	Regular education	Female	6	24	Master's Degree
6	ESL	Regular education	Female	17	63	Reading Specialist Degree
7	1	Regular education	Female	24	22	Master's Degree
8	1	Regular education	Female	18	21	Master's Degree

**Themes**

Three themes emerged from the overall interview responses of the participants' understanding of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. The participants' comments provided in-depth information about their beliefs of differentiating instruction to support ELLs in an inclusive classroom-learning environment. The themes are a result of the similar responses that acknowledged the value of differentiated instruction for meeting students' various learning needs. The themes are (a) differentiation is crucial for ELL instruction, (b) teachers use varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs' individual

needs, and (c) teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs.

**Theme 1: Differentiation is crucial for ELL instruction.** The participants shared similar thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences about implementing differentiated instruction as they work with ELLs. These similar thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences included giving ELLs opportunities for learning at as high a level as English-speaking students, raising expectations of what ELLs are capable of learning, providing opportunities for ELLs to learn at their own pace, and knowing what ELLs need at the next level to read above their grade level. Participant 1 stated, "Differentiated instruction should be designed with keeping in mind students' individual interests." Although the goal may be the same, the methods that teachers use have to be different for each child in the classroom. Participant 5 added, "Differentiation meets students at where they feel most comfortable." Participants 3, 6, and 7 agreed that using tiered lessons benefits students by allowing them to work at their readiness levels. Participant 2 stated, "I try to meet my students where they are so that I can build on more challenging concepts." Participant 4 stated, "Differentiating instruction is creating lessons and learning activities that will help all of the students in your class." Participant 8 stated, "Well, when you have students in one classroom on different levels with different needs, and they are working to learn the same concept, you have to change things in order to get it across to every student." The participants' understanding of how to implement successful differentiated instruction for ELLs varied. All of the participants agreed that differentiating instruction is crucial for ensuring academic success for ELLs.



**Theme 2: Teachers use varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs'**

**individual needs.** Teachers use varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs' individual needs. The participants felt that using differentiation is important to meet the needs of all students. Each participant also contributed their experience in working with ELLs in their classrooms. Teachers who work in inclusive classrooms and focus on differentiating their instruction provide alternative solutions for increasing academic achievement for all students, including ELLs. Developing differentiated instructional strategies can undo the adverse effects of students not performing at their learning levels. The participants stated they believe that every student can learn when introduced to the appropriate strategies that will meet their individual needs. Participants revealed that differentiating instruction can be implemented through the use of small group instruction, flexible grouping, learning stations, technology, and computer programs. The participants discussed the positive aspects of implementing differentiating instruction for ELLs. Participant 2 stated, "I use small group instruction with guided reading to reinforce skills that I want my students to learn." Participants 1, 3, 5, and 7 use learning centers that include hands-on activities to help guide ELLs with understanding lesson concepts and skills. Participant 4 stated, "We use guided reading to create small groups based on assessments. We then move students in and out of groups depending on when they master lesson content." Participant 6 also mentioned the importance and benefits of flexible grouping which keeps students from being in the same group all of the school year. There was a consensus among the participants that the strategies should align with the curriculum standards.

The participants expressed that there are resources designed to assist teachers of ELLs with successfully implementing differentiated instruction. Because ELLs enter classrooms speaking little or no English, the participants shared that teachers need to be consistent in their teaching practices and techniques when implementing differentiated instruction. Implementing differentiated instruction for all students will meet their educational needs; however, the participants felt that having insufficient time to plan was an issue.

The participants realized that successful implementation of differentiated instruction takes time and that putting forth extra effort to differentiate their teaching will result in increasing academic success for ELLs. The lesson plans that were collected from the participants showed variations of implementing differentiating instruction. Class activities were included to ensure that all students were involved in the learning process.

**Theme 3: Teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs.** Findings from this study indicated that the participants strongly believed in implementing differentiating instruction, but there is a need for professional development that is designed specifically for teachers of ELLs. The participants' responses indicated that it takes time to develop and create effective differentiated instruction for all students, including ELLs, in inclusive classrooms. The participants shared instructional strategies that they implement to increase academic success for ELLs. The strategies included flexible grouping, smart boards, on-line resources, interactive learning activities, strategies from Best Practices, small group

instruction, phonics programs, pre-recorded modeled lessons from Kentucky's educational television channel, and the monthly PLC meetings.

All of the participants want purposeful professional development that focuses on teacher collaboration for creating differentiated lessons and resources to assist teachers in modifying their teaching practices that will ensure academic success for ELLs in an inclusive classroom. Participant 2 added, "I would like to attend a professional development that is meaningful." Participant 1 stated the professional development was not specifically for ELL teachers and wants "the district to schedule a professional development that would equip me (and others) with the tools necessary for managing an inclusive classroom." Participant 3, stated, "To help overcome some of the challenges of implementing differentiated instruction, it would be great to have a lesson plan database of differentiated lessons that could be easily accessed throughout the district." Two of the participants received district professional development training because they work with ELLs, but are not required to attend the professional development held at the local school. The data results indicated that the participants believed they needed to be trained on differentiated instruction for ELLs. They also felt that ongoing professional development for new and experienced teachers would be helpful when creating and sharing resources.

Analysis of the data revealed that the participants would like to have more time to collaborate with other teachers to develop and create effective lesson plans, learning activities, and resources. Planning time during the day, according to the participants, is taken up with completing required paperwork and unscheduled meetings. The

participants agreed that planning time with colleagues would provide opportunities to share differentiated instructional strategies that have been successfully implemented in inclusive classrooms. They also felt that professional development that demonstrates teaching strategies for teachers is needed to enhance and modify teaching practices. Overall, the participants discussed their knowledge and meaning of differentiated instruction for ELLs, how to modify their teaching practices but remain aligned with the state standards, how to schedule more time to collaborate with team members, how to improve communication with ELLs who speak little or no English, and the significance of professional development for teachers of ELLs.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

The findings provide an understanding of participants' perceptions of working with ELLs and how they implement differentiated instruction for ELLs in inclusive classrooms. According to the findings of this study, as teachers employ different teaching practices, their professional growth improves in the learning environment. Collaborating with other educators for the successful implementation of differentiated instruction will lead to creating effective lesson plans and activities that will improve the academic achievement of all students, as well as ELLs. In this section I will present how the themes connect with the research questions.

**Research Question 1: What are elementary teachers' perceptions of working with ELLs?** The connection between Research Question 1 and Theme 1 involves teachers perceiving differentiation as a crucial component of implementing effective instruction to ELLs. Differentiation allows teachers to academically prepare all students,

including ELLs, with experiencing academic success according to their individual ability levels. Effective teachers understand that students learn best when classroom instruction matches their educational needs and learning styles. ELLs enroll in schools with different background experiences, cultures, languages, and interests. For these students to be successful teachers must adjust and differentiate their instruction to meet ELLs' needs. Because ELLs are not exempt from state testing, it is important that they have an opportunity to learn the same academic content as English-speaking students.

The participants shared in-depth information about their perceptions of differentiated instruction when working with ELLs. The participants believed that effective instruction for ELLs includes being aware of what these students know and what they need to learn. Participant 1 commented that differentiated instruction gives ELLs opportunities to learn at the same level as English-speaking students. Participant 2 had experience teaching in a school district that is smaller than the current district in which she works. Differentiation was not the approach that teachers were asked to implement for enhancing learning in their classrooms. There were very few ELLs enrolled in the school in which Participant 2 previously taught. Since moving to a larger city and a larger school district, Participant 2 is attempting to implement differentiation in her teaching. Participant 4 commented that ELLs are like any other student except when it comes to having a background in English. Therefore, differentiation helps students develop their learning styles so that they are eager to learn something new. Participant 6 pointed out that differentiated instruction is a strategy that can be used to teach the same concept but does not have to be taught at the same time. All of the participants agreed

that when given enough time to plan, differentiation increases teachers' abilities to create various learning tasks to help students understand concepts and skills in different ways.

Three out of the eight participants remarked that when working to differentiate instruction for ELLs, teachers should assess individual students' reading levels so that they can adjust strategies and practices that will support learning. Participant 5 commented that differentiation causes teachers to develop instruction that addresses what students are expected to learn and what they can do eventually independently. Participant 5 further commented that when teachers differentiate instruction, ELLs' confidence and motivation to succeed seem to increase. Participant 7 commented, "Since understanding and speaking English is hard for ELLs, differentiating instruction can help overcome the challenge of learning in a new environment. Differentiation means meeting them [ELLs] where they are". All eight of the participants agreed that a good solid education for ELLs is based on differentiating their teaching practices that will meet every student's needs.

**Research Question 2: How do elementary teachers differentiate instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom?** Theme 2 connects to research question 2 because teachers used varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs' individual needs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers can develop learning activities that will assist ELLs in being academically successful. It is important that instruction is tailored to enable ELLs to achieve grade-appropriate outcomes. Teachers in inclusive classrooms use a variety of resources, grouping patterns, and lessons that are engaging and relevant. ELL teachers focus on strategies that assist with mastering the elements of the curriculum.

All of the participants shared that their goal is to develop strategies that result in grade level reading for students who have mastered the skills they need to read and understand words in text on their instructional grade level. Participant 4 preferred to use the strategies listed in Best Practices. According to Participant 4, Best Practices gives him access to appropriate strategies for modifying lessons so that all students, including ELLs, have opportunities to excel in their learning. Participants 1 and 5 differentiate instruction using small group instruction for reading and sometimes with math. However, Participant 1 stated that her small groups are not necessarily for ELLs, but for all students depending on their reading level. Participant 5 commented, “Small group instruction gives students time to learn at their own pace. Providing reading material that is on students’ reading level is a strategy that is essential for ELLs to become successful readers”. Differentiating learning tasks helps improve academic performance. Participant 3 used flexible grouping when assigning students to reading groups. Students can move from one group to a group that is more challenging as soon as they are academically ready. Participant 3 also indicated that working together in flexible groups helps students reach common goals.

Six out of the eight participants expressed that they wanted to learn more strategies to help them overcome the basic challenges of ELLs within an inclusive classroom. Participant 7 stated, “That when ELLs enter the classroom speaking little or no English, this can become a challenging experience in which a solution is needed very quickly. There needs to be some changes made such as maybe additional multicultural staffing, which is differentiation. Six out of the eight participants, according to district

guidelines, do not give letter grades for primary students until Grade 4. Participant 3 believed that student effort is more important at the beginning of the school year. She uses hands-on activities, the document camera, and whole group computer lessons as a part of the literacy-reading block. She indicated that these strategies take the pressure off ELLs in trying to read difficult directions on worksheets when they are limited in their knowledge of English words and their meanings.

Two of the eight participants are teachers who pulled ELL students from the classroom for small group and individual help in reading and math. These participants used strategies from a phonics-based awareness program. This program differentiates instruction through hands-on learning, movement, music, and visuals. This program is an alternative to Guided Reading. Participant 7 explained that having the assistance of other school personnel as co-teachers helps with opportunities to differentiate instruction for ELLs.

All of the participants have access to a professional collection of resources located in the school media center for incorporating various strategies designed to assist teachers with planning differentiated instructional lessons. Participant 6 purchased a computer program called Rosetta Stone to help improve in speaking Spanish. Participant 6 is hoping that other teachers will purchase other languages from Rosetta Stone that can be used as a resource in helping to communicate with ELLs. If not, a request will be made to the school librarian to purchase additional languages from Rosetta Stone. All of the participants agreed that implementing differentiated instructional strategies is an effective and successful way to meet the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom.



I also analyzed lesson plans for evidence of ways the participants address ELLs' learning and how the teachers implemented differentiated instruction to address Research Question 2. Each participant provided a lesson plan. First, the lesson plans indicated activities that include concepts and skills the teachers expect their students to master. Secondly, the lesson plans also provided evidence of differentiated instructional strategies and activities that teachers implemented in the inclusive classroom daily. Third, the lesson plans revealed the common core standards, targeted strategies, and ways to assess student progress. Table 2 shows evidence that differentiated instruction is included in the weekly lesson plans. The table shows the strategies and activities participants implement to improve student learning. Also included in the table is the number of participants who indicated differentiated instruction strategies in their lesson plans.

Table 2

*Lesson Plan Evidence of Activities and Differentiated Instruction*

Strategy/Activity	Number of participants
Small group instruction	8
Technology use	8
Flexible grouping	8
Phonics worksheets	8
Relates to Common Core Standards	8
Learning centers	Only Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8
Assessment	Only Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8

**Research Question 3: What professional development do elementary teachers need to provide differentiated instruction for ELLs in the inclusive classroom?**

Theme 3 connects to Research Question 3 by establishing that teachers want purposeful

and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs. Professional development assists with identifying approaches that will inform teachers how to refine what is needed to improve student outcomes. Effective professional development focuses on content, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses modeling for practice, and offers opportunities for feedback. Professional development provides teachers with adequate time to learn new strategies that facilitate changes in their teaching methods.

All of the participants believed that professional development is an essential component of education that can assist teachers in implementing instruction for all student populations. They indicated that teachers needed to know how to create learning environments that will accelerate language development for ELLs. The participants shared information regarding how many and what types of professional developments they have attended.

Participant 2 attended a one-day professional development in which the facilitator presented several definitions of differentiated instruction. She watched several videos on how to differentiate instruction for reading and lastly was given some basic activities for differentiating instruction. Participant 1 did not have any professional development training that was specifically designed for teachers of ELLs. Participant 2 later expressed in the interview that it would be beneficial to have more than one professional development that would help with developing strategies for all students.

One of the goals of professional development is for teachers to gain a better understanding of how to develop and create lessons that are more effective for their

students. Participant 3 attended a district-wide professional development, which did not offer detailed differentiated instructional strategies for teachers of ELLs. Six out of the eight participants remarked that differentiated instruction is addressed during some faculty meetings. Ideas are given but never anything that can be implemented throughout the entire school day. According to the participants, effective professional development must target subject-matter content, the pedagogy of instruction, and differentiated instruction. Seven out of the eight participants wanted more professional development that will demonstrate and model differentiated instructional strategies that align with the Common Core standards. They indicated that effective use of strategies that address the Common Core standards would help with the delivery of lessons that will assist students to reach their full academic potential.

Embedded professional development can assist with interpreting assessments, lesson planning, Guided Reading, creating activities, and locating resources to meet the individual needs of ELLs. Six out of the eight participants agreed that having embedded professional development with ESL teachers to discuss the progress of ELLs helps with ways to meet the individual needs of ELLs. Participant 4 shared that he liked discussing the strategies that he uses at the monthly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. According to Participant 4, the PLCs are a way to help other teachers refine instruction for their students and are a way to learn how to use data to plan lessons. All eight participants agreed that attending professional development that is ongoing allows teachers to collaborate on lesson planning, provides opportunities to observe modeled lessons, creates learning activities, and gives examples of how to best utilize resources

that are available for differentiating instruction. A consensus from all of the participants was that creating modified examples of activities using differentiated instruction in an inclusive classroom allows students to practice what they have learned.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In this section, I interpret the findings as they relate to the larger body of literature. I discuss the conceptual framework that guided this study. I also discuss how the findings indicated what the participants needed to address to increase student achievement for ELLs.

### **Relationship of Findings to the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guided this study was Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Tomlinson's (2015) differentiated instruction. This conceptual framework was used in this study to investigate teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction in an inclusive classroom of ELLs. The conceptual framework encompassed the need for teachers to incorporate differentiated instruction that will assist ELLs in becoming successful learners in an inclusive classroom. Teachers of ELLs explained the need to modify their teaching practices to help ELLs experience academic success. The teachers elaborated that it would be beneficial to attend more on-going professional development training designed specifically for teachers of ELLs. The participants in this study welcome opportunities to learn how to implement differentiated instructional strategies that will support the active engagement of ELLs when learning new content.

The ZPD exists when students link together prior knowledge with newly acquired information (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky explained there are two areas of learning that teachers should consider. The areas are students' potential development level and the students' actual development level. Vygotsky believed that teachers can combine learning and development to create social activities for their students.

All of the participants had some form of professional development that was available from the district. However, they desired to learn how to effectively implement strategies that are crucial to increasing student learning. The works of Vygotsky revealed that teachers should consider that their students already know and build upon that knowledge. The next step is to allow the students to put that knowledge into practice.

Vygotsky's theory of ZPD emphasizes that the use of flexible grouping can increase ELLs academic performance. In this study, the teachers taught students of different ages, grades, and learning abilities. The teachers agreed that ELLs are capable of learning at the same level as English-speaking students if given time to develop their proficiency in speaking and understanding the English language. The concept of differentiated instruction suggests a need to modify classroom resources, materials, lesson plans, and strategies. Differentiated instruction encourages teachers to be flexible and self-reflective of the role as decision makers (Gibson, 2013).

According to Tomlinson (2014), there are four components of differentiated instruction: content, process, product, and the learning environment. Tomlinson emphasized that teachers who use differentiated instruction regularly in their classrooms find it useful and efficient while others find it difficult and tend to use it minimally.

Differentiation is a way for teachers to modify their instructional strategies to support all students with mixed abilities in reaching their academic potential. Tomlinson explained that differentiated instruction is based in children's interests, readiness, and learning profiles. Tomlinson further explained that effective instruction occurs when teachers modify their curriculums to help students' master concepts and skills.

Tomlinson (2015) stated that teachers of ELLs must understand the teaching strategies of differentiated learning involves the concept of change. Tomlinson (2014) elaborated the steps that teachers who develop and implement a differentiated curriculum should do: (a) plan for student engagement through the lessons, (b) provide pretest assessment opportunities, (c) propose effective strategies to help students know, understand, and do lesson content, (d) promote teaching with high expectation for students, and (e) prepare students for posttests. Tomlinson believed that students' readiness occurs when teachers match students' needs with what they are expected to learn. The participants' perceived that for ELLs to make significant progress, instruction must align with the curriculum. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) explained that teachers must have a wide-ranging collection of research-based instructional strategies on hand, but they must have the ability to "think out of the box" to ensure that the needs of each student are met.

### **Relationship of Findings to Literature**

In this section, I will connect the themes derived from the participants' responses to the prior research discussed in Section 1. Theme 1 and 2 are discussed together. As a reminder, the themes are differentiation is crucial for ELL instruction (Theme 1), teachers

use varied instructional strategies to meet the ELLs' individual needs (Theme 2), and teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs (Theme 3).

**Themes 1 and 2.** Baecher et al. (2012) stressed the importance of not delaying the teaching of content and academic skills to ELLs to allow for their full academic participation. This makes differentiation crucial for ELL instruction which aligns with Theme 1. Differentiated instruction can be implemented to assist students with academic growth by keeping in mind their interests. According to Morgan (2014), students who develop increased motivation are involved with activity choices based on their interests and strengths (Theme 2). Because ELLs enroll in schools with varying learning abilities, the participants in this study felt that it is important to modify learning activities that support learning (Themes 1 and 2). The participants restructured their instructional practices to focus on student interests and to maximize learning. Teachers in inclusive classrooms must consider a wide range of learning strategies when designing lessons (Theme 2). Instructional strategies can involve academic supports that help build learning environments (Villa & Thousand, 2017). Furthermore, teachers' experiences in the classroom also provide ways to modify instructional strategies that will meet the needs of ELLs (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). To empower teachers to increase academic achievement, participants in this study agreed that differentiated instruction is an effective approach.

The yearly academic performance of all students, including ELLs, is a concern for state and district school boards, principals, teachers, and all stakeholders. It is important

that all students are focused on academic standards that can increase their academic progress. Logan (2011) and Valiandes (2015) believed that when concentrating on the academic improvement of ELLs, it is beneficial to implement differentiated instruction (Theme 1). With the number of ELLs expected to keep growing, teachers are faced with an urgency to improve achievement for ELLs. Logan and Valiandes noted that aligning the curriculum with differentiated strategies can provide learning experiences to ensure that ELLs' academic needs are being met. Differentiation is an important approach that allows specific groups of students, such as ELLs, to learn at their own pace. Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) stated that successful teaching involves teachers differentiating their instruction in which the individual abilities of all students are considered (Theme 2).

The participants in this study used various differentiated reading strategies to assist with targeting skills that can lead to higher levels of reading comprehension and fluency for ELLs. Some of the strategies used by the participants were grade and age appropriate reading materials, word cards, phonics games, tapes, and songs, as well as grouping strategies. These findings as they relate to Theme 2 were similar to the kinds of strategies reported in prior research. Benders and Craft (2016) and Perry (2012) noted that grouping and regrouping students is a successful strategy that can address learning goals for all students. Frey and Fisher (2013) concurred with Reiss et al. (2011) that providing students with background knowledge before the reading lesson can help with learning vocabulary and support comprehension. Research indicated that students' phonics awareness affects their literacy performance. Beck et al. (2013) explained that schools with English as a second language (ESL) programs prove to be significant for



developing vocabulary for ELLs. Overall, researchers found that teachers used strategies best suited to the academic needs of ELLs.

**Theme 3.** The participants in this study strongly believed that there was a need for ongoing professional development. Teachers want purposeful and relevant professional development to meet ELLs' academic needs. The participants felt that professional development offers teachers opportunities to collaborate with other teachers. This collaboration can allow teachers to develop a lesson, teach the lesson, receive feedback about the lesson and revise the lesson. Professional development, according to the participants, assist teachers in becoming knowledgeable about strategies that can be implemented towards achieving special content goals and objectives. Dixon et al. (2014) and Alamillo et al. (2011) agree that teachers must acquire more knowledge to focus and address the academic needs of ELLs. Furthermore, these researchers added that relevant professional development can foster teachers' growth in implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom. Orchard and Winch (2015) stated that in school support from administrators (e.g., providing relevant professional development) is crucial for early career development for teachers and continuance in the teaching field.

Support for the findings was the result of participant responses, teacher surveys, and lesson plan documentation. Therefore, the plan was to develop a professional development training to assist teachers with the tools needed to modify their teaching practices to increase academic achievement for ELLs. Professional development allows teachers to learn new and innovative teaching practices and can extend their knowledge that may have a positive effect on how their students learn.

### **Project Deliverable as an Outcome**

According to Creswell (2012), a study should include findings, answers to research questions, personal reflections about data, and suggestions for future research. As the researcher, I followed the guidelines for ethical standards established by Walden University's IRB. In conducting this study, I endeavored to explore and gain insight into teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs in inclusive classrooms. As the researcher, I also gained a better understanding of the changes that teachers implement in their instructional practices that will meet the academic needs of ELLs. Data were gathered through scheduled semi-structured interviews, surveys, and lesson plan documentation. Findings from the study were written in narrative form with rich details. The findings indicated that the participants believed implementing differentiated instruction is significant and beneficial for increasing the academic performance of ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

Major findings of the study revealed that the participants shared similar knowledge of the importance of differentiating instruction for ELLs. This was evidenced by the response of their perceptions of working with ELLs. Participants' understanding of differentiated instruction ranged from their input about implementing differentiated instructional strategies to their thoughts regarding the educational supports needed for successful academic success in an inclusive classroom. The participants' responses indicated that differentiated instruction is significant for ensuring the success and meeting the needs of ELLs. The final consensus agreed upon by the participants was that there is a need for on-going professional development specifically designed for teachers of ELLs.

This consensus led to the development of a 3-day professional development training as the project deliverable for this study.

### **Conclusion**

The participants in this project study were elementary school teachers of ELLs who work in inclusive classrooms. The teachers shared their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about how implementing differentiated instruction can focus on the needs of all students, including ELLs. An in-depth narrative discussion of the findings outlined the themes that were a result of the participants' interviews. The most used methods of differentiation implemented by the teachers involved flexible grouping and small group instruction. The participants felt that there was a need for professional development as a means to implement successful instruction that will increase academic achievement in inclusive classrooms. In Section 3, I will discuss the project for this study, description and goals of the project, rationale for the project, the literature review, resources and supports, potential barriers, proposal for implementation and timeline, roles and responsibilities of students and others, and implication for social change.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. The data from the participants provided an abundance of information that addressed the research questions for this study. The findings indicated that differentiated instruction should be practiced in all classrooms. Teacher surveys and interviews revealed that teachers had not attended professional development sessions that are specifically designed for ELLs. The findings indicated that professional development sessions for teachers of ELLs should be continuous throughout the school year. The participants want the sessions to include ideas and suggestions about how ELL students learn, new and innovative uses of technology, how to better use the curriculum resources, and strategies for time management.

According to the findings, the participants disclosed that more professional development would contribute to direct opportunities for investing in strategies to enhance ELLs learning potential. In addition, the findings indicated that the teachers need professional development on creating strategies and lessons that have been proven successful when working with ELLs. The findings of this study were used to understand the significant elements and components necessary to be included in professional development sessions designed to increase teachers' knowledge about differentiating instruction for ELLs. Finally, the teachers remarked that they would appreciate opportunities to observe and visit fellow teachers as they model lessons using differentiated instruction. Observing fellow teachers would help gain a better

understanding of how to differentiate their lessons when working with a diverse group of students. Therefore, the goal of the study was to develop a professional development project that will allow teachers to exchange new reading strategies that will increase student achievement, encourage self-motivation for teachers and ELLs, and develop better communication skills for ELLs and teachers.

### **Description and Goals**

In this study, I explored primary teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs in inclusive classrooms. ELLs who are enrolled in classrooms have varying levels of English proficiency, which can affect many aspects of education. Implementing differentiated instruction is important because the population of school-aged ELLs has significantly increased in recent years in Kentucky. The participants emphasized that students at the study site (including ELLs) are performing below average on state tests. The participants further stated that there is a need for more professional development on differentiated instruction to assist teachers so they can better educate all students. The teachers in this Kentucky school district are being evaluated on their teaching effectiveness according to a new evaluation system: Principal Growth Effectiveness System. This system includes new standards, teaching practices, assessment, and accountability.

Conversations with the participants helped determine whether or not there is a need for professional development to assist with implementing differentiated instruction for teachers of ELLs. It was important to discuss with the participants how often they attended professional development sessions that focused on differentiated instructions for

ELLs. The results of the interviews indicated that the majority of the participants had not attended professional development sessions specifically designed for differentiating instruction for ELLs. Their knowledge of differentiated instruction was introduced in short segments while taking college courses and while attending other professional development sessions offered by the district and the local school. After analyzing the data, I concluded that there is a need for professional development to help teachers implement differentiated instruction for ELLs.

A 3-day professional development training could help teachers address the needs of ELLs in an inclusive classroom. The goal of this project is to provide teachers with opportunities to develop strategies of how to implement differentiated instruction for ELLs. Another goal is for teachers to create a binder of shared resources containing differentiated instructional lessons, examples of make and take hands-on activities, educational articles, and assessments that can be used as a guide to meet the needs of ELLs. The resource binder can be updated as additional strategies are presented to help teachers in an inclusive classroom differentiate their lessons so ELLs can reach their potential.

### **Rationale for Project**

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. The project was selected because of the research findings. As a result of the findings, a 3-day professional development training was created to assist teachers in implementing effective differentiated instructional strategies for ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

The teachers would benefit from a multiple day professional development that provides the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate differentiated instruction within their classrooms. Therefore, the findings from this study provided a framework for designing a 3-day professional development opportunity to include time to create lessons, time to collaborate and share ideas with other teachers, and time to create make and take activities to be used in the classroom. The study indicated a framework for specifically developing professional development sessions on implementing differentiating instruction for teachers of ELLs. These sessions will allow teachers to learn how to demonstrate effective instruction for ESL students within an inclusive classroom. Finally, since teachers are being evaluated on their teaching effectiveness according to the new evaluation system: Principal Growth Effectiveness System, the project may help them obtain skills that are deemed important for successful implementation of differentiated instruction for ELLs.

### **Literature Review**

Based on the research, the literature in this study indicated a need for implementing successful differentiated instructional strategies that will allow ELL student performance in reading to improve. Data indicated that multiple professional development sessions could offer teachers the instructional strategies they need to differentiate instruction for ELLs. My focus is on a professional development project to provide opportunities for teachers of ELLs to gain knowledge in implementing effective differentiated instructional strategies in the inclusive classroom. The range of years searched on the topic was from 2013 to 2018, with the inclusion of a few relevant studies

from 2011. I accessed peer-reviewed articles through Walden University library using the databases Thoreau, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and ProQuest Central. The key terms I used were *professional development*, *differentiated instruction*, *teacher collaboration*, *Carol Ann Tomlinson*, *qualitative research*, *instructional strategies*, *Best Practices*, *case study*, *English language learners*, *inclusive classroom*, *adult learning theory*, *Vygotsky*, and *professional learning community*. Combining these terms and databases provided sufficient literature to saturate the literature review.

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

Professional development guides teachers in implementing successful differentiated instruction that is designed to improve the academic performance of all students, including ELLs. Teachers learn how to apply new knowledge within inclusive classrooms. Professional development can enhance the learning experience for teachers and their students.

**Characteristics of professional development.** There are numerous characteristics of professional development as described in the literature. Professional development

- Helps ensure that ELLs are being provided appropriate instruction by highly-qualified staff (Cummins, 2014).
- Is important to teacher satisfaction and school success (Young, 2013).
- Provides a clearer understanding of content knowledge and instructional skills and strategies (Marrongelle, Sztain, & Smith, 2013; Mendoza, 2018).



- Can lead to positive changes in beliefs, attitudes, and practice, which increases the effect the teacher has on student learning (King, 2014).
- Can promote student progress (Fullan, 2014).

Researchers have indicated that effective professional development is a useful way to support teachers in building their knowledge, abilities, and skills to affect teacher practice, which, ultimately, affects student outcomes (Choi & Morrison, 2014; Kibler & Roman, 2013; Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016). Professional development is an opportunity for teachers to review their teaching methods and make changes that will reflect improved academic achievement for ELLs (Chiou-Hui, 2011). According to Bailey and Pransky (2014), professional development should relate to what is being taught, teaching strategies, and include appropriate accommodations and modifications. Professional development contributes to teachers' understanding of how to differentiate instruction that can maximize student learning. Cheatham, Jimenez-Silva, Wodrich, and Kasai (2014) remarked that professional development may decrease negative expectations among teachers by emphasizing diversity and understanding the development of ELLs. Professional development allows teachers to enhance their own instructional practices and to become active learners while improving their quality of teaching.

**Professional development and differentiated instruction.** Teachers who regard differentiated instruction as a strategy for ELLs to improve academically may support extended professional development. Firmender, Reis, and Sweeny (2013) and Quintero and Hansen (2017) stated that extensive professional development, which is focused on

differentiated instruction, has a positive effect on teachers' ability to implement those strategies in classrooms. Professional development that involves achieving too much in a one half-day session may provide some components of differentiation but may not effectively disclose or demonstrate instructional content because of time (Dixon et al., 2014). Professional development that occurs over time provides ample and on-going support during implementation of differentiated instruction. Most professional development consists of a 1-day workshop designed to increase teachers' skills and knowledge (David & Bwisa, 2013). However, Mansour, Alshamrani, Aldahmash, and Alqudah (2013) wrote that professional development is an intensive, on-going, and systematic process.

Professional development is a way for teachers to discover resources, strategies for modifying lessons, and hands-on activities that will improve academic performance for all learners (Gulamhussein, 2014). Using support staff as resources during professional development can assist in implementing effective instruction (Kostadinovic, 2011; Walters-Braker, 2014). Professional development can provide teachers with high-quality training in methodologies that relate to cultural and linguistic needs of ELLs that can ensure academic gains (deJong, Harper, & Coady, 2013).

**Effective professional development.** Desimone and Garet (2015) pointed out that professional development must provide active, focused, collaborative participation, and be centered on the content and goals of interest to teachers. Research indicated that professional development must be presented to adult learners with relevance to their daily

work and include opportunities to practice (Owen, Pogodzinski, & Hill, 2016; Stewart, 2014).

Facilitators who conduct professional development for teachers allow the attendees to share experiences they have had in their classrooms (Babinski, Amendum, Knotek, Sanchez, & Malone, 2018). Professional development offers opportunities for teachers to practice, apply, reflect on, and evaluate the skills they have learned (Nishimura, 2014). Bayar (2014) stated that effective professional development provides and engages attendees in active participation. Effective professional development allows teachers to be creative in their teaching practices, strategies, materials, and instruction to improve student achievement (Saunders, 2014). Attending professional development, in which a variety of learning opportunities are presented, can have a positive effect on teacher confidence, competence, and self-efficacy. Professional development designed with adult learners in mind makes the training sessions not only professional but meaningful.

### **Teacher Collaboration**

Collaboration starts with finding time to interact with colleagues to share thoughts and provide educational support. Teacher teams who are committed to collaboration exist in a continuum that ranges from developing to implementing to sustaining successful learning environments. Teacher collaboration involves teachers working together, engaging in dialogue, and having a common goal of improving and increasing student learning (Woodland, Lee, & Randell, 2013). Teacher collaboration is focused on teacher actions not student actions (Wells & Feun, 2013). According to Prachee (2017), teacher

collaboration is a component in education that aids in guarding against challenges related to implementing teaching practices and can enhance teaching quality. It is an effective strategy that can help build relationships among colleagues, aid in identifying appropriate strategies for improving student success, and can help in maintaining a conducive learning environment (Akin & Neumann, 2013). Collaboration encourages teachers to create innovative changes in their teaching practices, plan appropriate and rigorous lessons for their students, and plan opportunities for classroom observations.

Collaborative activities such as co-planning meetings and peer observation can provide teachers with opportunities to shape their teaching practices (Johnston & Tsai, 2018).

When teachers collaborate with team members or other colleagues, this effort contributes to an effective school culture and increases the academic achievement of students (Dufour, 2011). Teachers who collaborate maximize opportunities for cross-communication so that grade teams can contribute to larger group meetings that relate to student improvement. Working together develops steps for educational standards that measure student learning. Collaboration helps teachers develop a greater sense of accountability for promoting student success and is a key ingredient for student success. According to Wells and Feun (2013), teacher collaboration is a deliberate and intentional strategy used to analyze student achievement. Collaborative teaching between two or more teachers who plan lessons can effectively instruct diverse groups of students in a shared space (Ciechanowski, 2014). Ciechanowski (2014) further stated that collaboration among teachers provides opportunities to extend the meaning of the task that is to be presented. Moreover, teachers who collaborate combine their expertise and

experience to differentiate and deliver basic lessons during small group instruction. When teachers work together as equal partners, academic choices are made that can lead to positive student outcomes.

When school administrators schedule time for collaboration, teachers share in the responsibility for student success. Kitchen, Gray, and Jeurissen (2016) stated that principals can encourage a learning environment in which teachers are able to communicate, discuss, and exchange ideas on curriculum. Hallam (2015) noted the involvement of administration gave both structure and autonomy to collaborative groups. In addition, the study revealed that when administrators set the tone for collaboration, they can bring together the teachers by providing a shared vision. When principals allow teachers to work meaningfully in teams for extended periods, students improve in the learning process.

Teachers should collaborate with other teachers for support in addressing the specific needs of ELLs (Babayigit, 2014). Jao and McDougall (2016) revealed that the success of a group of teachers was rooted in the time they spent working together and building relationships; only after that time was put in, were they able to be productive and work towards a common goal. Jao and McDougall also concluded that collaboration is necessary to enhance teacher knowledge by implementing teaching practices that are considered effective.

### **Adult Learning**

Adult learning theory involves the assumption that adults learn through experience (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Adult learners seek a need for change

to advance improvement in their life and bring many experiences that may be relevant to their learning situation. Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory includes approaches that can be used to enhance effective adult learning practices that are intellectually stimulating. These practices should provide a positive aspect of the learning experience that teachers need and expect. Adult learners engage in activities to gain new forms of knowledge. They usually have an expectation that the knowledge gained will help further their goals. Mackay (2015) conducted a study in which 27 human resource practitioners in a focus group setting answered questions revealing their views of their professional learning development and the ways that these learning experiences were viewed as useful in their current positions and future careers. Mackay concluded that when employees viewed professional development as having benefits, self-efficacy, self-worth, and confidence increased.

Teachers should be consulted when it comes to their professional development needs. Potolea and Toma (2015) conducted a study that suggested teachers should be considered the first decision-making body in their professional development. Potolea and Toma (2015) concluded that the success of educational strategies in schools depend more on teachers who are permitted to make decisions about their learning sources, situations, and monitoring of their own progress. Further conclusions revealed that exclusion from the planning and design stages of professional development can negatively affect the goal of effective professional development for teachers.

Adult learning is not only about increasing the knowledge of teachers, but also ultimately about creating learning environments where the final result is increased

academic achievement for all students. Biereman and Merriam (2014) stated six andragogy assumptions for adult learners: (a) learners' self-concept, (b) experience, (c) readiness to learn, (d) problem-centered orientation, (e) internal motivation, and (f) need to know. Biereman and Merriam assumptions reflect how adult learners can develop a higher level of self-confidence by demonstrating what is being learned. The professional development training will create opportunities for adult learners to practice and sharpen their teaching skills, and assist in becoming more organized. Moreover, the professional development training will encourage adult learners to understand the importance of teacher collaboration and productive planning time that can be used for identifying additional strategies that can increase student achievement.

## **Conclusion**

This study was a focus on teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. There is a need for teachers to create and develop innovative strategies that may increase the academic achievement of ELLs in inclusive classrooms. Professional development training can offer a deeper understanding of how to implement successful strategies for all students. Effective implementation of differentiated instruction involves teachers collaborating to develop teaching practices that will assist students in comprehending skills and concepts. Working effectively together may result in positive outcomes for students. As adult learners, teachers aim to become more effective by making changes that are relevant in improving their life experiences and careers. Adult learners seek to understand the benefits and purposes of what is being

taught. When adult learners have the opportunity to choose what they want to learn, they feel empowered and confident to draw on their knowledge and experience.

### **Project Description**

The professional development will be based on the data collected from the participants. The findings indicated that there is a need for on-going professional development that is specifically designed for teachers of ELLs in an inclusive classroom. Resources will include a room suitable to accommodate space for participants to enjoy a continental breakfast and snack breaks. There will also be space for participants to divide into small groups at tables for team discussion. The room will have an area for laptops and printers, wall space for displaying large chart paper, and a work area with materials for creating lessons, games, and other activities for classroom learning stations. As the researcher, I will facilitate the 3-day professional development training with the assistance of additional school staff. The presenters will offer methods of instruction, modeling of appropriate grade level lessons, and discussions of the definition of differentiated instruction. Time will be allotted for teachers to share activities and lessons created during the professional development with the whole group. Because the presenters will be teachers from the local faculty, no funds will be needed to pay for facilitators from the school district.

### **Resources and Supports**

Many of the basic supports necessary for this project to be beneficial for teachers of ELLs already exist. The support group that will plan the professional development will include the local school administrator, the assistant principal, and me, as the facilitator.



Each classroom is equipped with computers and a Smartboard for visuals, and all teachers have laptops to access the internet. The school administrator and the assistant principal will need to discuss the time and dates for the professional development based on the school calendar. My obligation to this project involves facilitating the sessions and delivering essential materials to the training area. There will be no financial cost to participate in this project.

### **Potential Barriers**

The project was designed to meet the professional needs of ELL teachers who work in inclusive classrooms. I do not expect to encounter many barriers that will prevent the professional development training sessions from taking place. However, one possible barrier that could affect the success of the professional development is time. Grade groups may have planned team meetings (PLCs) to collaborate, develop, and create lessons and activities that can enhance their teaching practices. To keep this change of plans from occurring, grade team leaders should communicate with the school administrator about the scheduled professional development to avoid this issue. Another barrier to consider is teacher resistance. If teachers feel that this training is another professional development training that will not meet the needs of ELLs, they may be reluctant to attend. The solution to this barrier is for the facilitator to ensure teachers understand that the professional development will help them learn how to deliver effective differentiated instruction to improve ELLs' academic achievement.

**Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

Communicating the findings from this study with the school administrator, assistant principal, and the school counselor is essential. This project involved developing 3 days of professional development training sessions that included the three major themes based on the findings. The training session presenters are teachers from the local staff who will share their experiences about successfully implementing differentiated instructional strategies. I plan to start my professional development training during the next academic school year. I plan to use September, October, and November of 2019 for the training sessions. Below is the timetable I plan to use to implement the professional development:

- I will meet with the principal to confirm where the professional development will take at the school.
- I will meet with the principal to decide which 3 days of the 4 scheduled professional days on the school districts' calendar can be used for the training sessions.
- I will discuss with principal the goals, dates, and choice of staff members who will be presenters for the professional development.
- I will meet with the presenters to discuss materials, differentiated strategies for modeling lessons, and technology needed for the professional development.
- I will reserve the school cafeteria and school media center for professional development sessions.

- I will create an email list of participants to be used as a reminder of the professional development dates.
- I created an evaluation form as proof of professional development attendance, suggestions for future professional development trainings, and benefits of the professional development.

The completion time for developing the professional development training sessions is expected to take 3 months. The professional development for teachers new to the field of education can take place at the beginning of the school year with their grade groups within the local school.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

As the researcher, my role is to communicate the importance of the professional development training sessions to the school and school district leaders who have the responsibility of deciding the significance of implementing the project. I will be responsible for implementing the project. The role of the ESL teachers is to collaborate with their colleagues during the professional development training sessions that will address ELLs' interests, abilities, and readiness levels. The role of the administrator is to provide learning options for teachers that offer opportunities to increase their professional growth. Moreover, administrators will observe ELLs actively engaging in differentiated learning settings as a result of teachers participating in professional development training sessions in which differentiated instruction is the main strategy for inclusive classrooms.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The project will use a formative evaluation in which the participants will respond to questions that will measure whether or not the goal of the professional development was met (see Appendix A). A professional development evaluation form will be available to all participants after every session. This type of assessment will provide feedback on what the participants learned, what they found useful, and guides that can help implement instructional practices, ideas, and strategies. The results of the formative evaluation can be used to indicate growth, improvement, needs, support, and suggestions of any kind. To successfully implement differentiated instruction, the formative evaluation will assist the school administration in focusing on the changes or modifications needed by ELL teachers. The key to the success of the professional development is the enthusiasm that teachers show as they implement differentiated instruction that will help increase the academic achievement of ELLs.

### **Project Implications**

#### **Local Community**

Teachers discussed their experiences that support implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs in inclusive classrooms in an urban Kentucky school district. There are several implications for social change that involve offering opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their peers, developing and creating professional development to build teacher confidence with implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs. One of the implications of the project is that teachers will learn how to implement creative and innovative ways to help all students, as well as, ELLs meet state assessment requirements

by modifying their teaching strategies. The initiation of collaboration between teachers who teach the same curriculum can greatly benefit all students. Teachers who collaborate and teach the same curriculum have the responsibility to provide learning activities that support and challenge all students. Teachers new to the field of education who attend the professional development will learn how to differentiate instruction that will spark ELL's interests. Lessons that have been created and placed in a central location for all teachers to have access, will give the school administration opportunities to observe that teachers are actively implementing differentiated instruction on a daily basis with all students.

### **Far-Reaching**

The professional development training sessions have implications for change in other districts that can extend beyond the walls of the local school building. A short-term implication for the district could be an increased awareness of the significance of differentiating instruction for ELLs. This awareness could be accomplished by writing a report or summary to be sent to other principals in the district. On a larger scale, the neighboring and far-reaching school districts could conduct similar studies regarding teachers' perceptions of differentiated instructional professional development for ELLs who received instruction and support in inclusive classrooms. The professional development sessions could serve as a prototype for other districts across Kentucky and other U.S. states. Another far-reaching implication is that if teachers in the school are implementing differentiated instruction at a better rate, then their students may be more academically successful and more likely to succeed in school, graduate, and be better prepared for success in high school and college. This study has the potential for

encouraging implementing differentiated instruction for other school districts with similar demographics across the state of Kentucky as well as across the nation.

### **Conclusion**

Professional development training sessions were outlined to assist teachers of ELLs with a better understanding of how to implement differentiated instructional strategies that may increase student academic achievement in inclusive classrooms. Professional development offers teachers' opportunities to collaborate, understand, and reflect on modifying their teaching practices. Implementing differentiated instruction will encourage teachers to develop ways to teach new knowledge to their students. ELL students will benefit because teachers will use more current approaches to teaching. Administrators will benefit when they observe teachers exhibiting proficient practices that will improve student learning. As a result, from the gathered data from interviews, lesson plan documentation, and surveys, I designed a 3-day professional development training for teachers who work with ELLs in inclusive classrooms. In Section 4, I will present my reflections, impact on future research, project strengths, scholarship, and conclusions.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs in an urban Kentucky school district. Section 4 contains my reflections on this study. My reflections include my role as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. This section addresses implications on social change and the need for areas of future research.

#### **Project Strengths**

The first strength of this project is that the professional development is designed specifically for teachers of ELLs who work in inclusive classrooms with students of mixed abilities. The teachers can learn how to implement differentiated instruction to meet their students' education needs. The second strength of this project study is that the professional development is the result of the participants' interview responses and the collected lesson plans. This project study is meaningful because teachers may be more inclined to renew their passion in providing quality instruction. This suitable project includes opportunities for teachers to develop and share with their colleagues how to deliver effective reading strategies to improve academic achievement. This change in teaching practices could inspire teachers to explore other methods of improving academic performance for all students. Moreover, this project could expand the districts' curriculum and research-based objectives for this county, as well as other counties, which could lead to improvements in academic performance.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

The goal of this project is to provide veteran teachers and teachers new to the field of education with training to improve and modify their teaching practices to meet the needs of all students. One limitation of the project is finding teachers within the study site to volunteer as facilitators. The solution is to request grade-group team leaders to form a planning and facilitating committee for the professional development training. These team leaders can decide among themselves which one of the professional development days they would be responsible for modeling a differentiated teaching strategy.

Another limitation to implementing the professional development is that different grade group meetings and team meetings are usually not held on the same day or at the same time. The solution is to schedule the professional development on the district's professional days. The local school board of education uses 4 days of the school year for professional development. The local school board may approve a school's flexible professional development plan that allows teachers within a school to attend professional development opportunities outside of the days scheduled in the school calendar. Also, the local school board can approve the use of regular scheduled hours of the school work day for professional development. There is no school for students on professional development days.

Another limitation of this project is teachers may be unwilling to participate in the professional development due to lack of clarification of the project. A solution is to request from the school administrator time during a faculty meeting to discuss the



components, goals, and benefits of the professional development training. Additionally, set up a schedule for teachers to observe other teachers implementing the actual process of differentiated instruction as evidence of progress achieved by ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

This professional development project was designed as an in-service opportunity. An alternative approach to addressing the problem is to create a training video for teachers of ELLs who work in inclusive classrooms. The training video would include knowledgeable speakers and facilitators explaining their definitions of differentiated instruction. The video would have segments in which facilitators would target and model differentiated strategies for specific content areas. The video would include interactive segments in which the teachers would be given tasks to complete individually or with other team members. Materials would be provided for participants to complete tasks. During the interactive segments the video would be turned off. Time would be given for teachers to share completed tasks before the video is resumed. Following the video, handouts would be available for teachers to take that covered what is introduced and discussed in the video. An evaluation form would be provided for teachers to give feedback of how beneficial the training video was in helping to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms. As the researcher, I would facilitate the training video session. There would be a sign-in sheet as evidence of teachers attending the training video session.

### **Scholarship**

Forming this project study has afforded me the realization of how the effects of differentiated instruction can influence student learning. The project study provided opportunities for me to learn and grow as a researcher. In addition, as an adult learner, the literature review supplied information about the importance, benefits, and challenges of implementing differentiated instruction through professional development training that includes collaborating with other educators. Reading peer-reviewed literature about practicing differentiated instruction provided insights into how teachers perceive differentiation for all students. Furthermore, the literature helped me to understand that it takes time to implement successful differentiated instruction. As a result of the findings, I developed a proposed 3-day professional development training on creating differentiated instructional strategies for teachers of ELLs.

My knowledge of scholarship began before this project study. However, I needed to acquire more knowledge so that I could learn how to strengthen my academic growth. After retiring as a primary classroom teacher, I decided to further my education by pursuing my dream of obtaining a doctoral degree in education. Enrolling at Walden University was the first step in learning how to think critically and how to become a scholarly writer. The instructors at Walden helped foster an understanding of how to become a researcher. The coursework provided opportunities to learn about educational theorists and qualitative research approaches. Upon completion of this study, I have acquired knowledge about what is required to conduct research and accomplished my endeavor to make a difference in the community, with students, and among educators.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

I learned that developing a project that is effective and beneficial to teachers is time consuming. It takes many hours of research to plan how to develop differentiated instructional strategies that align with the curriculum and state standards. I had to include ways teachers in inclusive classrooms learn how to implement instructional strategies that will meet the needs of every student. One of the major concerns in developing plans for this project was to locate a space large enough in the school to accommodate all of the participants, materials, tables, laptops, printers, and an area for breakfast, snacks, and lunch. I worked hard to develop a project that was designed to allow teachers time to collaborate with their team members while providing opportunities for ongoing support. Scheduling time for teachers to share with other colleagues, model strategies, and locate resources is a significant part of project development. I learned that in developing a project, it is important to provide activities that will keep the attention of the participants. I used the themes, data, and findings as a guide to develop this project. I had to create an evaluation form for the project with open-ended questions requesting feedback about the professional development training.

### **Leadership and Change**

As an educator, I am currently a member of Religious Child Care & Community Educators Committee. The purpose of this committee is to help increase the number of preschoolers to be academically ready to enter kindergarten and function well in primary grades. Working on this project has created opportunities to learn how to differentiate instruction for these young children in preparing them to enroll in school. Sharing new

knowledge that supports teaching practices of the aforementioned committee will influence changes needed to differentiate instruction for diversity in age and learning abilities. Changes in instructional practices will result in the improvement of student learning. As the members of this committee collaborate, they will share educational interventions that will help these young students experience academic success.

Creating a professional development training that allows for a change in encouraging teachers to modify their instructional practices is significant for professional growth. As an educator, this project has sharpened my skills as the director of the education department at my local church. In addition, this project has inspired me to motivate the educational staff to try new ideas and suggestions as they work in the church tutoring program.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

This research was an opportunity to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect student differences. No two students are alike, and no individual student responds the same to learning in every situation. This project was designed to offer approaches that will enrich the classroom experience for all students. As educators, it is important to realize that learning nor teaching is a single process. Therefore, teachers must use differentiation in their lesson preparation that is appropriate for all students' broad range of abilities, intelligences, learning styles, and interests. Successful teachers of inclusive classrooms know that when they teach basic skills within the content of meaningful lessons, all students can achieve higher-level learning.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

As a doctoral student at Walden University, I had opportunities to grow as a professional and as a scholarly writer as well as increase my understanding of qualitative research. During my course work, I learned how to identify a researchable problem; locate, access, and analyze relevant peer-reviewed literature related to a topic; and develop research questions for collecting and analyzing data. The project study provided time to learn many new strategies, ideas, and resources that can be used to implement differentiated instruction in an inclusive classroom. The changes that teachers of ELLs put into effect can result in improved teaching, learning, and student progress. Implementing differentiated instruction makes for a better learning environment. This project is a basis for teachers to address the needs of a diverse group of students in an inclusive classroom.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, I identified a problem at a local school that significantly affected the schools' performance on state testing. Walden University taught me how to locate and review relevant literature for researching information related to the problem. Conducting this study permitted me to develop and share a professional development plan for promoting social change while discovering new and improved knowledge that will enhance my role as a leader. I will continue to build on my experience as a lifelong learner to manage and create a learning environment that is positive and meaningful for students. My learning experience at Walden taught me how to support my ideas, suggestions, and input with literature. As an educator, I have become an agent of change

for my colleagues by adapting differentiated instruction as a strategy to increase academic achievement.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I have learned there are many approaches that involve effective educational practices for teachers who work in an inclusive classroom. Currently, I am the Educational Coordinator at my church. Volunteering as a tutor, my desire is to learn and become knowledgeable about implementing differentiated teaching strategies that will enhance student learning. Most of the teachers who work in the tutoring program at the church are employees of the local school district and volunteer their time after school 2 days a week. Therefore, as a project developer, I sought to create a research-based project to assist these educators with their professional growth in education. The course work at Walden allowed me to learn how to research a problem and how to collect data that will address the problem. The research for this study involved learning current differentiated instructional strategies to improve the academic performance of ELLs in an inclusive classroom. Learning opportunities that improve the quality of teaching created a strong desire for me to become a better teacher. The experience of developing this project was enjoyable. As a result, my self-confidence as a project developer has increased.

### **The Project's Potential Impact for Social Change**

Educational environments are constantly changing. Teachers are encouraged to learn new and innovative ideas that will support differentiated learning for all students. As educators continue to learn, they grow and provide themselves with the tools needed

to meet the needs of all students. Implementing differentiated instruction has become a global topic that affects the local level and a much larger level. Addressing social change at the local level involves educators learning new teaching strategies that will improve student learning.

When social change affects the local level, ELLs will experience academic success and test scores will improve. As ELLs improve in their learning, teachers will feel a sense of accomplishment that they have connected with these students. ELLs will benefit from their teachers consistent implementing differentiated instruction. Beyond the local level, other school districts can use the components of the professional development to assist in providing successful implementation of differentiated instruction for ELLs in other districts across the United States. Application of this project study may aid teachers and administrators in school districts who need to understand how to implement effective differentiated instruction for ELL students.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The project for this study is a 3-day professional development training designed specifically for teachers of ELLs in an inclusive classroom. Participation in the professional development will allow teachers to create lessons and activities that can open up a new avenue for collaborating with colleagues. Attending the professional development will assist teachers in understanding how to deliver effective teaching practices to improve student performance. According to the responses from the participants on the survey, teachers attended professional development on differentiated instruction in the district, but they were disappointed that the various trainings were not

specifically designed for teachers of ELLs. Establishing peer-partnership with teachers new to the field of education will assist in providing a clearer understanding of implementing differentiated instruction. Future research should include the effectiveness of the professional development by creating a survey on how teachers are implementing differentiated instruction in their inclusive classrooms. Additionally, future research may include secondary teacher's perception of their ability to implement differentiated instruction for ELL students in higher grades.

### **Conclusion**

The completion of this project study provided an opportunity for self-reflection. I have evaluated myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The study was based on teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELLs in an inclusive classroom. According to the needs of teachers of ELLs, a professional development training was created for implementing differentiated instruction. I have assessed the benefits of my project. I will encourage myself to continue being a lifelong adult learner. I will endeavor to empower other teachers with the knowledge they need to understand on how to implement differentiate instruction successfully for all students in an inclusive learning environment.



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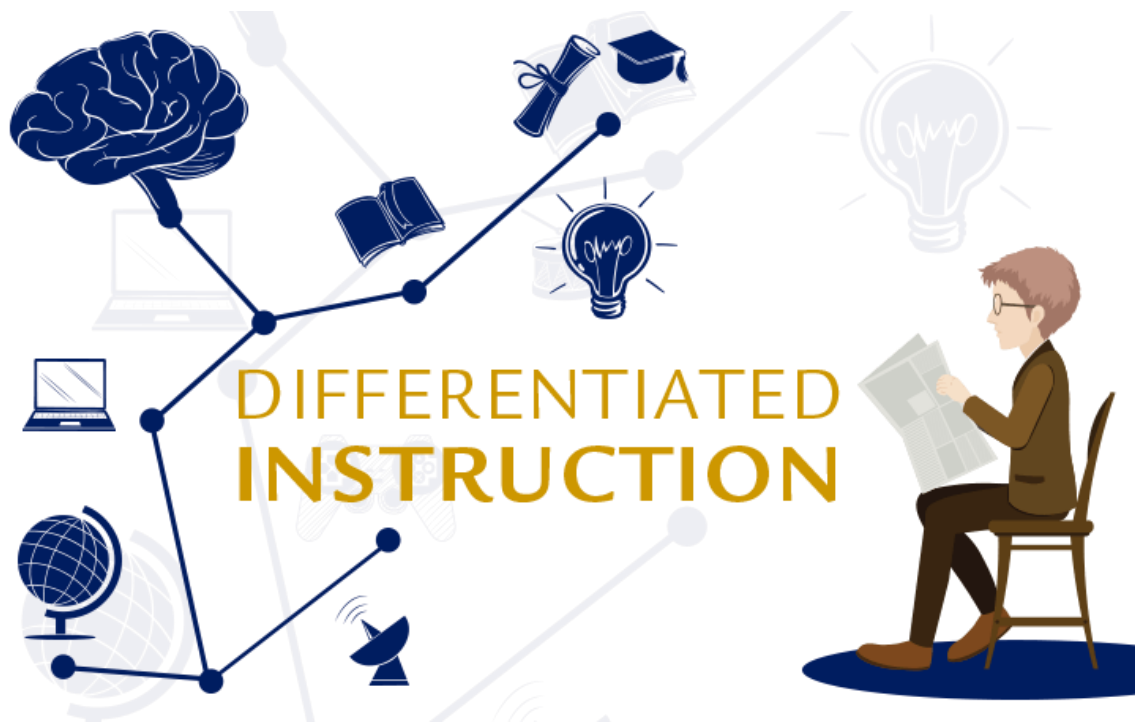
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## Appendix A: Final Project

**Professional Development: Differentiated Instruction for ELL Teachers in An  
Inclusive Classroom**

**2018 - 2019**



by

Mary Pegram

### **Purpose**

This project is planned to be a useful method of implementing differentiated instructional strategies for primary teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) in an inclusive classroom. The professional development training sessions are based on the findings of a study conducted at an urban school district in a southern state. Results of the study indicated a need for a 3-day professional development for teachers of ELLs. The professional development will involve teacher collaboration relating to differentiated instruction and the creation of resources, lessons, and hands-on activities to increase academic performance of ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

### **Target Audience**

The target audience for this project will involve elementary primary teachers of Grades 1 - 3 and ESL teachers.

### **Professional Development Training Schedule**

The project involves three sessions for the professional development training. The training sessions will take place over the course of 3 days. To ensure the effectiveness of the training sessions, Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory was used. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) was used as a guide for the professional development project.

### **Professional Development Goals**

- A. Educate teachers of ELLs with the foundations of the basis of implementing differentiated instruction.
- B. Present teachers with the skills necessary to implement differentiated instruction for ELLs in an inclusive classroom.

C. Provide teachers of ELLs opportunities to collaborate in creating lessons that can be implemented in an inclusive classroom.

D. Provide teachers of ELLs with the components of differentiated instruction.

### **Professional Development Outcomes**

A. 1. Teachers of ELLs will have added assistance and support while implementing differentiated instructional strategies.

B. 1. Teachers of ELLs will be introduced to strategies that can be used to implement differentiated instruction.

C. 1. Teachers of ELLs will have the opportunity to work with other teachers to create and develop modified lesson plans for differentiating instruction.

D. 1. Teachers of ELLs will leave the professional development with a better understanding of the components of differentiated instruction.

### **Professional Development Objectives**

A.1.a As the result of attending the professional development sessions, teachers of ELLs will have continuous support as differentiated instruction is being implemented in inclusive classrooms.

B.1.a As the result of attending the professional development sessions, teachers of ELLs will be introduced to additional strategies to use the tools of differentiated instruction.

Some tools may include smart boards, document cameras, and computer reading programs that focus on vocabulary and phonics, and web quests.



C.1.a As a result of attending the professional development sessions, teachers of ELLs will have collaborated with other teachers to plan lessons that can be used to demonstrate that differentiation is being implemented.

D.1.a As a result of attending professional development sessions, teachers of ELLs will be able to model the components of differentiated instruction while teaching in an inclusive classroom.

## The Differentiated Classroom



# **Welcome Everyone!**

**Note: Welcome teachers who are new to the field of education and veteran teachers who teach primary ELL students. Emphasize that these training sessions are designed to improve teachers' efforts to implement differentiated instruction for students assigned to an inclusive classroom.**

**Day One Materials:**

- ❖ Folders
- ❖ Chart paper
- ❖ Pens
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Note pads (sticky)
- ❖ Teachers' school assigned laptops
- ❖ Printer
- ❖ Smart board

**Day One: Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Instructional Strategies****Session One: Timeline for Day One**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:30-9:00	Teachers will assemble in the school cafeteria to sign-in, pick up folders, and enjoy a continental breakfast (breakfast, lunch, and snacks provided by school hospitality fund).
9:00-9:45	The professional development facilitator will begin morning session with an icebreaker designed to indicate teachers' knowledge about differentiated instruction. The following questions will be printed on large chart paper and posted: What does differentiated instruction mean to you? What are some challenges you face as a teacher in an inclusive classroom? What is your definition of differentiated instruction? Why do you think teachers need to differentiate instruction? (Tomlinson, 2015) Activity: Teachers will write their responses to each question on sticky notes and attach them to the appropriate posted chart paper.
9:45-10:30	Teachers will view the following short videos by Carol Tomlinson: "Five Key Aspects of Differentiated Instruction", "An Introduction to Differentiation", "Getting started on Differentiation". ( <a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a> )

	Activity: Participants will be asked to write and share their questions about the information presented in the videos.
10:30-10:45	Restroom break and snacks
10:45-11:30	Teacher Presenter 1 will share experiences about successfully implementing differentiated instructional strategies for students in an inclusive classroom, including ELLs. To conclude the morning session the professional development facilitator will recap the components of differentiated instruction and review how to get started with differentiation in an inclusive classroom.
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:15	Teacher Presenter 2 will present a lesson plan for reading using differentiated instructional strategies that have been successfully implemented in inclusive classrooms. Participants are encouraged to ask questions or make copies of the presentation. Copies of the lesson plan will be distributed to participants for future reference or to be used as a guide (Amaro-Jimenez, 2014).
1:15-2:00	Teacher Presenter 3 will demonstrate how to utilize the smart board for locating activities for differentiating lessons, and examples of student work and projects. Activity: Participants will compile a list of hands-on activities that can be used for implementing differentiated instruction.
2:00-2:45	Teacher Presenters 1, 2 and 3 will lead a panel discussion addressing the responses to the questions attached to chart paper from icebreaker activity.
2:45-3:00	Teachers will locate professional development form on laptop, fill out session information, and print a copy or email form to school secretary as evidence of attending day one of professional development.

**Note: Teacher presenter will share experiences about successfully implementing differentiated instruction for students in an inclusive classroom.**



**Day Two Materials:**

- ❖ Folders
- ❖ Pens
- ❖ Teachers' school assigned laptops
- ❖ Printer
- ❖ Chart paper
- ❖ Markers/ Highlighters
- ❖ Binders

## Day Two: Professional Support and Collaboration

### Session Two: Timeline for Day Two

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:30-9:00	Teachers will assemble in the school cafeteria, sign in, and enjoy a continental breakfast.
9:00-10:30	<p>Professional development facilitator will review the information presented and responses to questions about differentiated instruction for students from day one session.</p> <p>Activity: Teachers will meet in grade groups to discuss and highlight relevant information on chart paper from day one session.</p>
10:30-10:45	Restroom break and snacks
10:45-11:30	<p>Teacher Presenter 1 will present several examples of differentiated instructional strategies that have been successfully implemented in inclusive classrooms (Herrell &amp; Jordan, 2008)</p> <p>Teacher Presenter 2 will model a lesson using one of the strategies presented by teacher Presenter 1. Copies of the lessons will be distributed to the students for future reference.</p>
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:30	Teachers will meet in school media center to review and generate a list of differentiated instructional strategies and activities, according to their grade level, from the teachers' professional collection of resources located in the media centers reference session. Strategies and activities will be placed in a grade group binder for future reference (Lee & Buxton, 2013).
1:30-2:15	Teachers will select a differentiated instructional strategy and begin to create a lesson plan for students in an inclusive classroom, including ELLs (Taylor, 2015). Teachers will use the format presented by teacher Presenter 2 to create the lesson plan.
2:15-2:45	Teachers will have an opportunity to check their lesson plans for learning elements such as: flexible grouping, learning stations, small group instruction, and the use of technology.
2:45-3:00	Teachers will locate professional development form on laptop, fill out session information, and print a copy or email form to school secretary as evidence of attending professional development.

**Note: Professional development facilitator will visit each grade group to answer questions or make comments about differentiated instruction for students.**



**Day Three Materials:**

- ❖ Folders
- ❖ Binders
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Crayons
- ❖ Construction paper
- ❖ Scissors
- ❖ Glue / Glue Sticks
- ❖ Poster board
- ❖ Letter Press
- ❖ Paper Fasteners
- ❖ Stapler / Staples
- ❖ Copy Paper

- ❖ Smart board
- ❖ Teachers assigned laptop
- ❖ Printer

### **Day Three: Professional Support and Collaboration Continued**

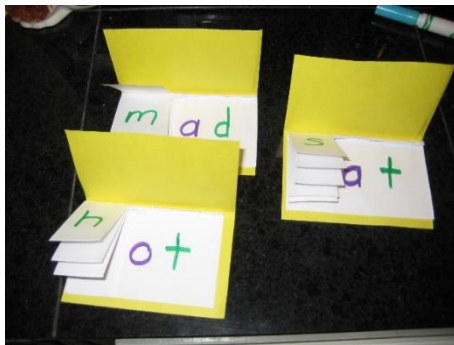
#### **Session Three: Timeline for Day Three**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:30-9:00	Teachers meet in the school cafeteria, sign in, enjoy a continental breakfast
9:00-9:30	The professional development facilitator will review with teacher's examples of differentiated instructional strategies in a whole group setting. Teachers are asked to share strategies that they are currently implementing to meet students' needs in their classrooms.
9:30-10:30	Teachers will meet in grade groups to continue refining lesson plans created in the previous session. Teachers will share lesson plans with grade team members. Teachers will create a list of hands-on activities for learning stations.
10:30-10:45	Restroom break and snacks
10:45-11:30	Teachers will reassemble in the school cafeteria to continue creating lesson plans for their grade levels in all curriculum areas.
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:15	Each grade group will share with the whole group a lesson plan created for students in an inclusive classroom using differentiated instructional strategies.
1:15-1:45	The professional development facilitator will share another lesson with participants implementing differentiated instructional strategies (Richards-Tutor, et al., 2016). Participants can make comments or ask questions about the lesson presented. Copies of the lesson will be distributed to participants for future reference.
1:45-2:30	The professional development facilitator will meet with teachers new to the field of education as a support for implementing differentiated instructional strategies in their classroom.



	Teachers will continue to create lesson plans, hands-on activities, and games for implementing differentiated instruction for students in an inclusive classroom. Lesson plans will follow the format presented by professional development facilitator and teacher presenters (Vazirabad, 2013).
2:30-3:00	Teachers will locate professional development form on a laptop, fill out session information, and print a copy or email form to school secretary as evidence of attending professional development. Teachers will also fill out a professional development evaluation form and return to professional development facilitator.

**Note: Professional development facilitator will meet with teachers new to the field of education as a support for implementing differentiated instruction in their classrooms. Teachers will continue to create activities for students in an inclusive classroom.**



## Professional Development Training Evaluation

Name\_\_\_\_\_ (optional)

Please provide an answer to each question to help establish the benefits of attending differentiated instructional professional development.

1. How did the information and material presented during the professional development training help you better understand differentiated instruction?
2. What educational tools suggested during the professional development training would you use in the inclusive classroom to help you meet the educational needs of your students?
3. How do you think collaborating with other teachers will benefit you when differentiating your lessons?
4. How do you think this professional development will benefit teachers new to the field of education?
5. How would you rate your overall experience in attending this professional development for teachers of ELLs?

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol for First, Second, and Third Grade Teachers

**Interview Questions and Procedures for  
First, Second, and Third Grade Teachers**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Mary Pegram

Project Study Topic: Teachers' Perceptions of Differentiated Instruction for English  
Language Learners

Participant Interview Procedure:

1. I will introduce myself to each participant and explain the intent of the study.
2. I will ask participants to share any questions of concern about the study.
3. I will inform participants that the interview will be taped.
4. Participants will receive a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy of answers and to make corrections or additions.
5. I will give information about the consent form to participants and obtain a signature from each participant.

**Interview Questions**

1. What is your experience in working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)
2. What are your perceptions of working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)
3. In your experience, what have been some benefits of working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)

4. What instructional strategies have worked well with English Language Learners?  
(RQ2).
5. What challenges, if any, have you faced in differentiating instruction to meet English Language Learners educational needs? (RQ2).
6. What subject areas do English Language Learners need the most assistance? (RQ2).
7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of differentiating instruction when working in small groups with English Language Learners? (RQ2).
8. Explain the importance of having all of your students actively engaged in a differentiated instructional learning environment. (RQ2)
9. In what ways have you learned to collaborate with other teachers who are using differentiated instruction in their classrooms? (RQ2)
10. What professional development have you had that has been beneficial for differentiating instruction for English Language Learners? (RQ3)
11. What would you like to have more help with when implementing differentiated instruction while working with English Language Learners? (RQ3).
12. What did I not ask that you would like to discuss?

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol for ESL Teachers

### **Interview Questions and Procedures for English as a Second Language Teachers**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Mary Pegram

Project Study Topic: Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing Differentiated Instruction  
for English Language Learners

#### Participant Interview Procedure:

1. I will introduce myself to each participant and explain the intent of the study.
2. I will ask participants to share any questions of concern about the study.
3. I will inform participants that the interview will be taped.
4. Participants will receive a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy of answers and to make any corrections or additions.
5. I will give information about the consent form to participants and obtain a signature from each participant.

#### **Interview Questions**

1. What is your experience in working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)
2. What are your perceptions of working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)
3. In your experience, what have been some benefits of working with English Language Learners? (RQ1)

4. What instructional strategies have worked well with English Language Learners?  
(RQ2).
5. What challenges, if any, have you faced in differentiating instruction to meet English Language Learners educational needs? (RQ2).
6. What subject areas do English Language Learners need the most assistance? (RQ2).
7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of differentiating instruction when working in small groups with English Language Learners? (RQ2).
8. What professional development training have you had to prepare you for working with ELLs? (RQ3).
9. What differentiated instructional practices would you like to have more help with when working with English Language Learners? (RQ3).
10. What did I not ask that you would like to discuss?



#### Appendix D: Differentiated Instruction Open-Ended Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information related to my research topic about differentiated instruction within inclusion classrooms. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The finding of this research will provide meaningful information about teacher perceptions of differentiated instruction for English Language Learners. Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this project study.

Participant # \_\_\_\_:

**1. Please indicate the grade level (s) that you teach.**

- ☐ Grade1
- ☐ Grade 2
- ☐ Grade3
- ☐ Grade4
- ☐ Grade 5

**2. Please indicate your current teaching certification.**

- ☐ ESL
- ☐ Regular Education

**3. Please indicate your highest level of education.**

☐ Bachelors

☐ Masters

☐ Educational Specialist

☐ Other

**4. How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_****5. How many students do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_****6. Have you participated in any differentiated instructional professional development training for teaching students with multicultural backgrounds?****7. What are your perceptions about differentiated instruction for ELLs?****8. Have you created lesson strategies that include implementing differentiated instruction or do you get your strategies from a published source? If you use a published source, please list.**

## Appendix E: Lesson Plan Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Does Not Meet</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>Performance</b>	1	2	3
<b>Standard</b>	No reference made to the standard	Related context standard is minimally identified	Related content standard is fully detailed from common core
<b>Objectives/ Learner Outcome</b>	Lesson objective lack clarity or connection to standard	Lesson objective somewhat clear	Lesson objective is clear and specific to standard
<b>Materials &amp; Use of Technology</b>	Materials and technology are given limited attention in lesson plan	List of materials and technology is provided with worksheets from resources attached to lesson plan	List of materials and technology is provided for both teacher and students; worksheets are reference
<b>Introductions</b>	Little or no evidence of lesson purpose	Introduces lesson purpose and relevance; partially state teacher and student roles	Introduces lesson purpose and relevancy uses language understood

			by students; fully state teacher and student roles
<b>Procedures</b>	Lesson shows no evidence of teaching modeling; no evidence for guided reading or independent practice	Lesson plan has limited plans for modeling; indicates few opportunities for guided reading and independent practice	Lesson plans have explicit procedures for teacher modeling; opportunities for guided reading and independent practice thoroughly detailed
<b>Closure</b>	Lesson ends with little or no review focus on next activity	Teacher reviews lesson with limited or some student participation	Students review lessons by sharing what was learned; teacher revisits lesson purpose
<b>Differentiation</b>	Teacher puts forth little effort to differentiate or make link to student prior knowledge	Differentiation is somewhat linked to student prior knowledge	Teacher lessons indicate necessary strategies for differentiation among students